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FIFTY YEARS

THREE INTERVIEWS

Paul M. Sweezy
Harry Magdoff
Ellen Meiksins Wood

Guest Editor
Christopher Phelps

1949-1999 50 YEARS

Special 100-page issue with seventeen photographs

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

This issue marks our fiftieth anniversary. We're sure our readers don't need to be told about the odds against a socialist magazine surviving through this particular half century. We began at a time when socialism was a dirty word in the United States, and we're still here today, in fact growing again, after a decade in which people have been abandoning socialism in droves.

But we're not going to waste time congratulating ourselves on our longevity. In the pages that follow, we reflect on our past, our present, and our future, on the changes we've seen and the work that still needs to be done. All we want to add in these Notes from the Editors is our assurance to our readers that we have every intention of carrying on. We won't forget that what has kept us alive is our ruthless critique of capitalism and imperialism, and equally our willingness to criticize and

(Continued on inside back cover)

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INTRODUCTION: A SOCIALIST MAGAZINE IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

by CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

In a human life, attainment of the fiftieth year, while cause for reflection, is nothing exceptional, statistically speaking. For a magazine of the American left, fifty years is a veritable eternity. Simply to reach the age is a stunning achievement.

Think of the ever-looming threats that have destroyed so many promising radical publications in the century now drawing to a close. Government harassment and repression destroyed the *International Socialist Review* and the *Masses* during the First World War. Withdrawal of financial backing caused the loss of the *Seven Arts* in 1917 and the *Marxist Quarterly* in 1937. An editor's death brought an end to the *Modern Quarterly* in 1940, and an editor's caprice eliminated *Marxist Perspectives* in 1980. Loss of perspective and declining subscriber rolls extinguished the country's greatest radical newspapers seventy years apart, the *Appeal to Reason* in 1922 and the *Guardian* in 1992. Splits or fusions in sponsoring groups or parties caused many other publications to be abandoned. Then, lest we forget, there is sheer discouragement, demoralization, disorientation, and disenchantment. Countless left-wing periodicals lie defunct and yellowing in archives, reminders of the once-great aspirations of writers and readers who watched their dreams scatter to the wind.

Some fates, on the other hand, are worse than death. Perseverence can indicate sterility instead of vitality. Year in year out, the issues may appear, but if they merely recite the same rote formulae, then the ideas are musty though the ink is fresh. Life can drain out of a project

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in other ways, most commonly by dilution of purpose. What profiteth a periodical if it gains the world and loses its soul? Maturity so often brings hankering for status, audiences, and influence once properly disregarded. Rationality starts to seem to require abandoning revolution, good sense to require compromise, and good taste to dictate a closer eye toward fashion. Such are the ways that a brilliant Marxist magazine like *Partisan Review* moves to the liberal center, finally arriving at neoconservatism.

The miracle of *Monthly Review* is that it is alive in all senses. It has made it to an advanced age without having lost the spring in its step, stayed true to its socialist promise while remaining alert and engaged with the world around it. What has been its secret?

1.

At risk of confusing historical materialism with crass materialism, let's start with the money. Not that anyone ever expected to make money, or did, from *Monthly Review.* But it is one thing to dream of a magazine, quite another to pull it off, and an essential condition for actually establishing a publication, even a radical one, on a national scale is to have the means to do it properly. You must pay the printer, the rent, the phone, the lights, the heat, the postage, and the staff. Even the writers, from time to time.

It is fortunate that any intelligent Marxist theory of history admits a role for chance, because *Monthly Review* might never have come to be had it not been for Cleopatra's nose—in this case, Professor F. O. Matthiessen's unanticipated inheritance.

Matty, as he was known to his friends, among them his former Harvard colleague Paul Sweezy, was a distinguished scholar of American literature, author of *American Renaissance* (1941), and a founder of American Studies. He was also a Christian and a socialist who rejected Marxism while freely drawing insights from it. Matty and Paul were present at the creation of the Harvard Teachers' Union in 1935.

In late autumn 1948, after the debacle of Henry Wallace's independent presidential campaign, which both men had supported, Matthiessen visited Sweezy at the family farm in New Hampshire where Paul was residing, having resigned from Harvard a few years before. After a walk outdoors, they were sitting by the fire, having a drink. Out of the blue, Matty informed Paul that he had unexpectedly inherited a considerable trust fund after his father had died as a result of an automobile accident in California. Matty was a full professor at Harvard, a successful author, with no dependents. He didn't need the money. Would Paul like it to start that magazine he and Leo Huberman were always talking about?

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This windfall—a commitment of $5,000 for three years in succession, totalling $15,000, or $75,000 in today's purchasing power—made the launching of *Monthly Review* possible.[1]

2.

In other words, the money, as any good Marxist would have guessed, was a manifestation of social relations. Not extraction of surplus value, mind you: this gift was several steps removed from the accumulation process. Relations, rather, of friends acting in concert, the kind of social relations that have kept *Monthly Review* afloat ever since.

First among friends were Leo and Paul, the editors. They differed in background, one steeped in the New York left, the other in New England's higher learning, one born into the lower middle class, the other into relative privilege, one Jewish, the other Protestant. Each, though, had become a Marxist in the depth of the Depression, just as the Nazis took power in Germany. Each had studied at the London School of Economics. Each had been an editor and a writer. Just before the United States entered the Second World War, they met and became friends. Cast apart for the war's duration, they became reacquainted afterward and began to contemplate a socialist magazine of a new sort.

The career of Leo Huberman (1903-1968), seven years older than Sweezy, shows the depth of intellectual and political experience that the two brought to *Monthly Review.* Born and raised in New Jersey, Huby graduated from New York University in 1926, studied in England in 1933-1934, and received an M.A. from NYU in 1937. He was the author of *We, the People* (1932), a popular history of the United States published when he was twenty-nine, and *Man's Worldly Goods* (1936), a general economic history which sold more than five hundred thousand copies, as well as *The Labor Spy Racket* (1937) and *The Great Bus Strike* (1941). He held a series of positions: chair of the social sciences department in 1938-1939 at New College, an experimental unit of Columbia University's Teachers College; labor editor of the liberal paper *PM* in 1940-1941; columnist for *U.S. Week* in 1941-1942; director of public relations and education for the National Maritime

[1]Francis Otto Matthiessen (1902-1950), afflicted by a profound sense of isolation and hopelessness as a gay man and a radical in the context of deepening Cold War anti-radicalism, committed suicide in 1950. His life and work were commemorated in *Monthly Review* 2 (October 1950), the first of such extra-thick special issues; see also the superb appraisal by Leo Marx, "Double Consciousness and the Cultural Politics of F. O. Matthiessen," *Monthly Review* 34 (February 1983): 34-55. The executors of his estate honored the original pledge at the slightly reduced level of $4,000 in each of the remaining two years. The story of Matthiessen's crucial role was recounted by Paul Sweezy in his address at MR's thirtieth birthday celebration, May 1979, tape recording, Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Institute, New York University.

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Union in 1942-1945; and editor of the experimental pamphlet division of the publisher Reynal and Hitchcock in 1945-1946. Promoter, popularizer, publicist, Huberman devoted all of his considerable energies to *Monthly Review* until his death from a heart attack in Paris in 1968.[2]

Although Huberman and Sweezy's were the sole names on the masthead, several other people had great importance in the magazine's early life. One was Otto Nathan (1893-1987), a German emigré, former advisor to the Weimar Republic, New York University economist, and close friend of Huby's. The third founding editor, Nathan hesitated to be listed publicly on the cover, though he did write several signed articles in 1949. After that first year, Nathan parted ways with the others, but his short tenure ought not obscure his crowning achievement: obtaining a contribution for the premier issue from Albert Einstein. The physicist whose name was synonymous with genius called the establishment of *Monthly Review* an "important public service" at a time when "free and unhindered discussion" of socialism had fallen "under a powerful taboo."[3]

An even more crucial figure during the first fifteen years was Paul A. Baran (1910-1964). Baran was initially unknown to most readers because he used a pseudonym, Historicus. But he had a warm friendship with Sweezy dating from 1939, when he arrived in the United States from Europe after studying in Moscow, Berlin, and Frankfurt. He began writing for MR under his real name in 1956, and he gained renown around the world as the author of *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957), which explained the enormous discrepancy between rich and poor nations as the result of the imperialist structure of the world economy. By the early 1960s, when it began to be common to refer to an "MR school"—a term that did not always sit easily with those it purported to describe—Baran's name was almost always mentioned in the same breath with Huberman's and Sweezy's. "No parlor pinks," observed *Business Week* in 1963, "the trio peddles a brand of socialism that is thoroughgoing and tough-minded, drastic enough to provide the sharp break with the past that many leftwingers in the underdeveloped countries see as essential." Hired by Stanford in 1948 and tenured in 1951, Baran was probably the only publicly declared Marxist then teaching in an American department of economics, but he was treated coldly by his faculty colleagues and subjected to a salary freeze by an administration cowed by alumni pressure. Haunted by insomnia and stress, he died of a heart attack

[2] *Leo Huberman: October 17, 1903—November 9, 1968* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968) and the Leo Huberman Papers, Special Collections, University of Oregon Library, Eugene, Oregon.

[3] Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?" *Monthly Review* 1 (May 1949): 9-15; "Dr. Otto Nathan, An Economist," *New York Times*, 30 January 1987; Paul Sweezy, interview by Aleine Austin, 19 January 1982, Oral History of the American Left.

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in 1965. The book he had all but finished writing with Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (1966), would become the defining theoretical reference point for a new generation of radical economists in the next ten years.[4]

3.

What united these thinkers, the central project that enlivened *Monthly Review* from the start, was what Baran termed "the *critical* appraisal of the capitalist order in the light of reason."[5]

From its very first issue, *Monthly Review* challenged the prevailing view that through managerial fine-tuning, capitalism had an infinite potential to grow. *Monthly Review* opposed class exploitation and the organization of production for private profit rather than social need. Its editors and writers maintained that poverty, inequality in wealth and income, racial oppression, imperialism, and waste were permanent and endemic, not atavistic or peripheral, features of capitalist society. In contrast to then-prevalent liberal assumptions, *Monthly Review* held that social irrationality and injustice could not be resolved by better policy solutions offered within the framework of the capitalist state or property relations. The task of intellectuals was to demystify the current order as thoroughly as possible, to practice, again in Baran's words, the "continuous, systematic, and comprehensive *confrontation of reality with reason.*"[6]

Although the leading lights of *Monthly Review* were virtuoso economists, and although the magazine, especially by the 1970s, would become known for its excellence in political economy, it is worth underscoring that in its social theory MR never depicted capitalism in narrowly economic terms. This is true even in *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy's magnum opus, where they described the mature capitalist economy as "monopoly capitalism" in order to emphasize the concentration of capital in a handful of giant firms in each leading industry. Although they wrote in the midst of the long postwar boom, which had created a number of illusions among mainstream analysts, Sweezy and Baran identified powerful systemic tendencies toward stagnation. The most original aspect of their assessment was to identify the factors that had offset stagnationist tendencies after the Second World War, including the massive highway and suburban growth stimulated by the automobile, vast Cold War arms expenditure, and the wasteful expansion of advertising and sales. This assessment

[4]"Viewing U.S. Economy with a Marxist Glass," *Business Week*, 13 April 1963. Baran's life and work were commemorated in a special issue: *Monthly Review* 16 (March 1965).

[5]Paul A. Baran, "On the Nature of Marxism," *Monthly Review* 7 (November 1958): 263.

[6]Paul A. Baran, "On the Nature of Marxism," 259.

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was, as Sweezy would later express it, "much more than . . . economics in the usual meaning of the term."[7]

The point is not just that *Monthly Review*'s approach to economics was unabashedly historical, critical, and political. It is not even that in intellectual interests the *Monthly Review* group roamed far and wide, with Sweezy initiating a signal historical debate about early modern Europe, for example, and Baran exploring psychoanalysis. Nor is it that the magazine was unrestrictive in subject, ranging from natural science to anthropology, with editorials on such unpredictable topics as the quiz show scandal. The important point is that *Monthly Review* stood in fundamental opposition to the *whole* of the capitalist order—economic, cultural, ideological, political, and social.

This stance had profound political implications. Namely, the responsibility of intellectuals was not to be counselors to power (policy wonks, to borrow an apt if graceless phrase from our own day) but to maintain radical independence of judgment, to practice what Baran described as "clarity, courage, patience, faith in the spontaneity of rational and socialist tendencies in society." Socialist aspirations, even if they relegated left-wing intellectuals to the outside edge of what C. Wright Mills called the "American celebration," were a source of realism that *Monthly Review* refused to forsake for the mirage of influence. "Nor should we continue to kid ourselves that we have only to water down our program a bit, accommodate here, and compromise there—and we will be a force again," wrote Huberman. "Not so. That is the road to our own extinction. For what do we gain if our voice is finally heard again—but the message it proclaims is garbled, or so modified as to be no longer worth hearing? Let us, instead, do what we can do—speak out honestly and clearly for what we stand for."[8]

4.

Yet financial means, talent and experience, and a coherent outlook, while valuable traits, do not alone explain the success of *Monthly Review* at a time when socialism was becoming, as the editors observed in their first editorial, "little more than a dirty word." History cannot be willed, and the magazine's infancy coincided with what might have been the worst period for American socialists in the entire twentieth century: the heyday of McCarthyism.

[7]Paul M. Sweezy, "Paul Alexander Baran," *The New Palgrave: Marxian Economics*, ed. John Eatwell, Murray Milgan, and Peter Newman (New York: Norton, 1990): 52; Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).

[8]Paul A. Baran, "Better Smaller But Better," *Monthly Review* 2 (July 1950): 82-86; Leo Huberman, "The Debs Way," *Monthly Review* 7 (January 1956): 346-352.

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It was no casual thing to subscribe to a socialist magazine in the early 1950s. *Monthly Review* had to be mailed out in plain wrappers. In the climate of official accusation, investigations, and guilt by association—of Truman's loyalty oaths and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, of J. Edgar Hoover and the Rosenberg execution, of people setting their radical books out on the curb with the trash—*Monthly Review* may be counted as lucky merely to have survived.

But it did far more than that, and the paradox should not go unobserved. Most Marxist ventures are launched in bursts of enthusiasm, in days when mass radicalization provides ripe audiences, when enormous marches in the streets make the goal of a revolutionary transformation appear somewhat less far-fetched than usual. *Monthly Review* was launched in 1949, when the left was in headlong retreat, under tremendous attack, and disintegrating rapidly. As a result, *Monthly Review*'s subscribers increased steadily from 450 at the time of the first issue to 2,500 in 1950 and 6,000 in 1954.

As a result? Yes, for that is the paradox: a good part of the left, beset and beleaguered, in a state of confusion, fragmentation, and even depression, stood in need of precisely the kind of calming and reasoned analysis, simple and straightforward language, openness to voices from multiple quarters, and uncompromising independence that *Monthly Review* quickly came to exemplify. The independent Marxism of *Monthly Review* ran counter to the prevailing national winds, but it was perfectly suited to a bruised American left seeking new modes of expression and new forms of community, with a recent history of disappointment and organizational failure.

5.

At first, *Monthly Review* was a pole of attraction for a precise milieu on the left. It reflected the concerns and politics of those who had lived through a shared political experience, that of the Popular Front, and who were trying in troubled times to find a way to keep expressing their socialist convictions while quietly reflecting upon many aspects of Marxist practice and theory. This independent socialist cohort provided the core of readers, supporters, and writers who were a precondition for the success of the magazine.

The immediate background, reaching unhappy conclusion a mere six months before, was Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign. After serving a term as vice-president under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Wallace was appointed secretary of commerce in 1944. He was kept on, after FDR's death, in the administration of Harry S. Truman until his criticism of Washington's increasingly hardline anticommunism in foreign policy forced his resignation. His 1948 candidacy represented an attempt to revive the New Deal coalition of labor, the left, and liberals within a new Progressive Party.

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While he was not much of a radical or a particularly sharp political thinker, Wallace ran decidedly to the left of Truman on civil rights and opposed the escalating Cold War. His public support, relatively substantial at first, was an extension of the militant left wing of labor and the New Deal, the sort who had supported Roosevelt's reforms and hoped to deepen them. Instead, the campaign marked the break-up of "progressivism." Truman usurped much of Wallace's domestic program while becoming an ever more strident cold warrior, typifying the midcentury embrace of redbaiting by mainstream liberalism. In the end, Wallace got only one million votes, rather than the five or ten million some predicted he would receive.

The group that launched *Monthly Review* did not think the problem had been that Wallace had run as an independent. The deplorable drift of the Democratic establishment only confirmed to them the value of exploring alternatives to the two-party system. Huberman even called for "the creation by labor of a political party of its own to advance its interests."[9] The real problem, the editors thought, was that the Popular Front against fascism had been replaced by an intensified crusade against Communism, often designed and executed by liberals. The left-liberal alliance of the Depression and Second World War was being severed in the Cold War atmosphere.

Wallace's poor showing was doubly tragic to the founders of *Monthly Review* because he had not focused attention upon genuine political alternatives to capitalist society. Sweezy and Huberman had served together on the Progressive Party's national platform committee. They thought he had been mistaken to refrain from a genuinely radical program, which had allowed Truman to appropriate his domestic policies and meant that supporters of the Progressive Party were not drawn toward any larger understanding of the need for changes in the social system. Wallace had simply stood as a third and better candidate.[10]

On the left, many were thinking along the same lines as the editors of *Monthly Review.* Their hopes for change had been fired by the great movements of the 1930s and rekindled after the Second World War with the demise of the fascist powers and the great strike waves at home. Most radicals had not expected reaction to be nearly so fierce and quick in coming. Some capitulated, but many were far from ready

[9]Leo Huberman, "Capitalism and American Labor," *Monthly Review* 1 (May 1949): 24.

[10]Actually, *fourth:* South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond led a white supremacist breakaway, the States' Rights Democratic Party, which won four Southern states. Wallace had an almost identical popular vote (2 percent) but did not win in any state. The Progressive Party was disbanded after its dismal showing in 1952, when Wallace declined to run. *Monthly Review* carried much debate about the Progressive Party, including a piece by Wallace himself: "Needed: Cooperation Between the US and the USSR in a Strong U.N.," *Monthly Review* 2 (May 1950): 7-10.

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to give up the ghost. Their memories were still fresh with marches of the unemployed, sit-down strikes by industrial workers, campaigns against racial segregation, and student rallies against fascism and war. Many of them drew a similar balance sheet of disappointment regarding the 1948 election. *The National Guardian*, launched in 1948, was the journalistic expression of this milieu, which had its more cerebral and analytical offshoot in *Monthly Review*.

6.

The existence of this sort of opinion—socialist but independent, unrestricted by party position—would hardly have been thinkable ten years before, which is another way of saying that the difference between the 1930s and the late 1940s was not merely in the disintegration of the New Deal coalition but in the weakening of Communist Party influence on the left.

Quite substantial during the Great Depression and Second World War, the Communist Party was still significant in 1949, especially compared to the remnant of the once-vast Socialist Party. But as a result of its own errors and severe attacks upon it, the CP was experiencing a hemorrhage in membership. Its periphery was increasingly restive. Although the magazine had a varied readership from the beginning, many *Monthly Review* readers and writers were veterans of the Popular Front that the Communist Party had spearheaded, and they often looked back on that history with pride. But they shared to one degree or another—it would be a mistake not to admit a range—Huberman and Sweezy's opinion that the time had come for a politically and intellectually *independent* left.[11]

In the view of Huberman and Sweezy, the Communist Party had not carried out enough explicit education for socialism, had too often lost its socialist bearings, had frequently violated the protocol essential for cooperation on the left, and had a mistaken habit of denouncing anyone who did not support its line completely and unreservedly. Their views, in short, were not unlike those of journalist

[11]To take a panoramic view of the whole of the left, "independent socialist" was a term of choice in quite distinct radical spheres during the early Cold War. For example, the Independent Socialist League (1949-1958) was moving beyond Trotskyism at the same time when many from Popular Front backgrounds were beginning to develop doubts about Stalinism. The ISL and MR would have viewed one another as political opponents, which makes it all the more fascinating that each adopted the self-description "independent socialist" in the same year, 1949. (Hal Draper, editor of the ISL paper *Labor Action* for its duration, wrote five significant books on Marx published by Monthly Review Press in the 1970s and 1980s, although that reflected political cooperation more than convergence.) See Christopher Phelps, "Independent Socialist Clubs/International Socialists," 348-51, and "Draper, Hal," 197, in Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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I. F. Stone, who in *Monthly Review* expressed weariness with "the stultifications and idiocies, the splits and the heresy-hunts, which make the Communists so ludicrous a spectacle half the time."[12]

But Stone made that remark while opposing those who proposed to purge the CP from the Progressive Party. That was consistent with *Monthly Review*'s corollary tenet: rejection of redbaiting. *Monthly Review* opposed government attempts to outlaw Communist activity, resisted prejudicial judgments against individual Communists, and fought the barring of Communists from political coalitions or educational institutions because of their political affiliation alone. The pages of *Monthly Review* were, by example, open to Communist contributors.[13]

This was nothing less than an attempt to create a new left-wing culture, not a mere political stance. In a lead editorial for an early forum in the magazine, "Cooperation on the Left," the editors rejected both redbaiting and exempting any group on the left from criticism. After distinguishing cooperation from unity, they wrote that the U.S. left's "historic task of capturing the most formidable citadel of capitalism" would require humility all around: "a certain minimum willingness to face facts, to accept criticism, to admit mistakes, and to try new methods."[14]

7.

Cooperation was not merely a rhetorical expression at *Monthly Review*. All who recall the magazine's early circle speak of its extraordinary spirit of companionship and relatedness.[15]

[12]I. F. Stone, "Problems of the Progressive Party," *Monthly Review* 1 (April 1950): 381. Esther Rowland and Aleine Austin mention the Communist leadership's praise of the 1941 imprisonment of Trotskyist leaders under the Smith Act, its enforcement of the categorical wartime no-strike pledge, and the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia as factors contributing to independent Marxist unease and disillusionment with the Communist Party; interview, 7 December 1980, Oral History of the American Left [Rowland is identified in the finding aid by her maiden name, Edelman].

[13]The Communist Party, however, attacked *Monthly Review* in several articles, the first of which declared Sweezy and Huberman "un-Marxist and anti-Marxist." Alexander Bittelman, "Where is the 'Monthly Review' Going?" *Political Affairs* 30 (May 1951): 34-53; "The Ideological Struggle on the American Left," editorial, *Political Affairs* 42 (August 1963): 1-18; and Hyman Lumer, "Monopoly Capital: The Baran-Sweezy Model," *Political Affairs* 46 (February 1967): 11-25. See also Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, "Reply to Mr. Bittelman," and Paul Sweezy, "Certain Aspects of American Capitalism," *Monthly Review* 3 (November 1951): 212-227. For indication of the editors' views about the left in 1949, see Paul Sweezy, interview by Aleine Austin, 19 January 1982, Oral History of the American Left.

[14]Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "Cooperation on the Left," *Monthly Review* 1 (March 1950): 336, 338.

[15]Perhaps this rare camaraderie was as much necessity as intention; the tragedies of Matthiessen and Baran illustrate the intense need for political and moral community in the repressive domestic environment of the Cold War. On MR's esprit de corps, see Aleine Austin, interview, 19 January 1982, Oral History of the

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Who created that communal sensibility? Along with the two editors, we might begin with two women who were on staff from the beginning and who would remain with *Monthly Review* to the end of their lives: Gertrude Heller Huberman (1902-1965) and Sybil Huntington May (1893-1978).

Gert, the youngest of twelve children who had immigrated with her parents from Russia at age three, was accountant and subscription manager. A former schoolteacher, bookkeeper for the League for Industrial Democracy, and supervisor of Long Island nursery school education for the Works Progress Administration, she had been married to Leo since 1925. In its first three years, *Monthly Review* was published from their apartment up three flights of stairs on Barrow Street in Greenwich Village and from their summer place at Martha's Vineyard, where a garage became a makeshift office. Every month, Gert lugged the sacks full of journals to the post office.[16]

Sybil May, a graduate of Vassar College, had met Leo when he taught briefly at the experimental City and Country School in Greenwich Village, where she had a long career. Older than the others, she retired from teaching at about the same time *Monthly Review* was founded to serve as record-keeper, correspondence respondent, and an impeccable proofreader who kept the magazine virtually error-free for nearly thirty years.[17]

In other words, the initial staff—Leo, Paul, Gert, Sybil—were close friends. Around them gathered a wider group of shared inclination. Meetings were held with radical graduate students from Columbia and Harvard, and with intellectuals and prominent figures of the left, such as Oskar Lange, Michael Kalecki, Max Werner, Cedric Belfrage, James Aronson, and Barrows Dunham.[18]

The "Notes from the Editors" columns, wrapped inside the front and back covers of the magazine, and known around the office as "Nifties," following the acronym NFTE, were a chatty way of enhancing and focusing these associations. Updates about the doings of the editors and their friends were accompanied by endless enjoinders to readers to subscribe, to get their friends to subscribe, and to get local libraries to purchase MR pamphlets and books. The Nifties also served over the years to extend the magazine's ecumenical solidarity

American Left; Harry and Beadie Magdoff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, 20 September 1998.

[16] *Gertrude Heller Huberman: September 1, 1902 — September 16, 1965* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965); Beadie Magdoff, interview by author, New York, 6 January 1999.

[17] *Sybil Huntington May: May 7, 1893—October 3, 1978* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

[18] Paul Sweezy, interview by Aleine Austin, 19 January 1982, and Esther Rowland [identified as Edelman in finding aid], interview by Aleine Austin, 7 December 1980, Oral History of the American Left.

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to the events and publications of other sectors of the left, ranging from the Friends of Kathy Boudin to the *Young Socialist.*

In the winter of 1950-1951, support for the magazine became more formal with the establishment of Monthly Review Associates, a group of donors, volunteers, and political allies coordinated for many years by Sybil May. Its first chair was Henry Pratt Fairchild (1880-1956), who had taught sociology at New York University from 1919 to 1945 and was the author of *Economics for the Millions* (1940), among other books. Founding treasurer Aleine Austin represented a younger cohort who had come of political age in the 1940s. A graduate of Antioch College who had attended the Highlander School in Tennessee, Austin served as an assistant to Huberman at the NMU during the war, obtained an M.A. from Columbia University in 1947, and was author of a popular history, *The Labor Story* (1949); subsequently, she would obtain a Ph.D. and teach American history at several institutions.[19]

The Associates were not merely an indispensable source of cash donations but a social gathering point. A program of lectures began in March 1951, when Joshua Kunitz spoke on "Toward an Understanding of Socialist Culture." The best-attended talk, in May 1958, featured British socialist G. D. H. Cole on the subject "Socialism and Capitalism in the World Today," with sociologist C. Wright Mills as chair and 1,100 in attendance. In March 1961, the well-known English economist Joan Robinson addressed "Anti-Americanism."

Such were the efforts and people, young and old, familiar and surprising, who sustained *Monthly Review* from the beginning. It was in every sense of the word a collective enterprise, one whose spirit is reflected in the shared editorship that has characterized the magazine (always co-edited) and, in a different way, in the brown-bag lunches still held once a week at the office where the editors preside over a salon with any guests who happen to be visiting New York that day from the far corners of the earth.

There is another way to put all of this. Sweezy, Huberman, and Baran—Harry Magdoff was equally prominent after 1968, as is Ellen Meiksins Wood today—were crucial to *Monthly Review.* They were responsible for elaborating its ideas, mission, and reach. But their names might never have reached as wide a public were it not for that family of people who make any such project work: friends, staff, board members, donors, writers, supporters, readers, subscribers.

In the course of time, the small original band was joined or succeeded by newcomers, both fleeting and permanent, whose full range of experiences—friendships, conflicts, attainments, mishaps, antipathies, and desires—can only be hinted at in recollections like this one:

[19]Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, "Henry Pratt Fairchild, 1880-1956," *Monthly Review* 7 (November 1956): 242-243; Aleine Austin, interview, 19 August 1982, Oral History of the American Left.

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During the summer break from college in 1962, I was employed at MR at minimum wage to perform menial tasks—primarily, as I recall, related to mailing books and sending invoices—while I soaked up Marxist wisdom from the very air in the office. (I must also have soaked up smoke from the cigarette perpetually dangling from Leo's lower lip.) On the rare occasions when Paul Sweezy appeared in the office, I was speechless with lust. I doubt Paul ever had the slightest idea of what was going on in the young intern's head and I, of course, never let on.[20]

Among the lasting additions to the staff were Bobbye Ortiz (1918-1990) and Judy Ruben (1931-1997). Ortiz had left a middle-class Jewish family in Arkansas to attend Barnard in 1933, where she took part in groups against war and fascism before transferring to the University of Chicago, where she helped support the steelworkers' organizing drive. From 1939 through much of the 1950s, she lived in Mexico and England, returning to the United States to serve as assistant to Huberman beginning in 1957. As associate editor from 1968 to 1983, she helped connect the magazine to Latin American and socialist-feminist currents. Ruben, raised in a left-wing family that was close to *Monthly Review,* and therefore friends with Leo and Sybil May long before she joined the staff in 1974, ranged well beyond her duties in permissions and rights to become something of an institutional ambassador to the wider world.[21]

Monthly Review, in short, has been the product of considerable activity from below, much of it by women neglected in historical and journalistic accounts of the project. Many people, past and present, from volunteers to assistant editors, contributed to the life of the institution by carrying out the crucial tasks: answering the ever-ringing phone, reading manuscripts, attending to advertising and promotions, replying to correspondence, laying out the pages, sitting on committees.[22]

8.

No matter how great the staff's esprit de corps and moral commitment, 1949 was a difficult time to launch an independent socialist magazine in the United States. The magazine's politics—"socialist,

[20]Laura (Gelles) Joseph, letter to author, 4 June 1998.

[21]Bobbye Ortiz, interview by Aleine Austin, 28 June 1983, Oral History of the American Left; Bobbye Ortiz, "Remembering 25 Years," in *Monthly Review: Our First Forty Years — A Celebration & A Challenge* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989); Al Ruben, telephone conversation with author, 16 January 1999.

[22]Many among the relatively unsung staff and leading Associates wrote occasionally for *Monthly Review,* and their writings provide interesting insight into their thinking. See, for example, Sybil Huntington May, "The Tonic of Revolution," *Monthly Review* 15 (June 1963): 80-86; Aleine Austin, "Behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott," *Monthly Review* 8 (September 1956): 163-167; Henry Pratt Fairchild, "Why I Believe in Socialism," *Monthly Review* 1 (November 1949); and Bobbye Ortiz, "On the Nuclear Family," *Monthly Review* 22 (May 1970): 50-56.

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Marxist, non-Communist but willing to cooperate with anyone, including Communists, on agreed aims and by agreed methods"—made it exceptional at a time when the red menace stalked the national imagination.[23]

Consider just a few events of 1949. Regents at the University of Washington voted in January to dismiss three professors for alleged Communist backgrounds (with Sweezy testifying as an expert on Marxism before the faculty committee). At the University of California, regents voted in June to impose loyalty oaths on the Cal faculty. A Smith Act trial held from January to October resulted in the imprisonment of eleven Communist Party leaders for conspiring to "teach and advocate" the violent overthrow of the government. Popular opinion reached the level of mass hysteria as Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, entered court on charges of perjury as he contested charges of passing classified documents to Whittaker Chambers, an ex-Communist. Outside of Peekskill, up the Hudson River from New York City, those returning from a Paul Robeson concert in September 1949 were bloodied by a miles-long mob chanting "Jew bastard," "dirty nigger," and "Moscow lover." No wonder that many *Monthly Review* contributors adopted such bylines as "A University Professor of Social Science." In the September 1949 issue, *every single contributor* preferred to remain anonymous.

The repression took full McCarthyist shape after the summer of 1949, when revolution shook China and the Soviet Union successfully detonated an atomic bomb. In a 1950 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, Senator Joseph McCarthy sought to blame Communist infiltration of the Roosevelt and Truman State Departments for the "loss" of China. A heresy hunt ensued, fed by the deepening Cold War, the expansive designs of U.S. empire, business's desire to roll back the gains of labor and the New Deal, and conventional major party rivalry.[24]

The design and virtual effect of the anticommunist crescendo was to eliminate the influence of the American left in every corner of society—labor unions, government, publishing, film, television, and education—by tainting radical dissent with the odor of "subversion." All radicals were forced to fear for their livelihoods. The sweeping character of redbaiting and its symbolic rites is illustrated by the

[23]Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, "A Challenge to the Book Burners," *Monthly Review* 5 (August 1953): 159.

[24]The editors of *Monthly Review* interpreted McCarthyism as a reactionary, brutal, and vulgar American variation upon fascism, with an anxious popular following but a real base among the *nouveaux riches*, such as Texas oil millionaires jealous of the Eastern aristocracy of wealth and established corporate monopolies. The editors initially thought it an open question whether the reactionary McCarthy wing of capital or the Eisenhower ruling class would win out within the Republican Party. See "The Roots and Prospects of McCarthyism," *Monthly Review* 5 (January 1954): 417-434; "The Crisis of McCarthyism," *Monthly Review* 6 (January 1955): 305-311.

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attacks visited upon the editors of *Monthly Review,* neither of whom had ever belonged to the Communist Party.

In 1953, Leo Huberman was called before McCarthy's Subcommittee on Investigations of the Senate Committee on Governmental Operations, where he was interrogated about his books, many of which the State Department had bought for its reference libraries. Rather than invoke the Constitutional right not to incriminate himself, as many witnesses had, Huberman stated that he had never been a Communist and refused to answer all other questions on Constitutional grounds of free speech. His stance won him praise from the British *New Statesman and Nation:*

> This has rarely, if ever happened before. The Senators threaten contempt citations against witnesses who plead the Fifth Amendment; they were not prepared for attacks on themselves for undermining the First by exceeding their legal powers. Here lies the strength and the importance of Leo Huberman's position. Neither a government employee nor dependent upon universities or other private employers, a frank statement could not prejudice his employment. Though it takes courage to make a public avowal of free speech for heretics, especially Marxists, he felt that someone had to make a start.[25]

Sweezy's day before the inquisitors came in 1954 after he was summoned by the New Hampshire Attorney General to answer questions about his involvement with the Progressive Party and a guest lecture he had given at the University of New Hampshire. Sweezy refused to answer on the grounds that his political beliefs should not be subject to government inquiry. He lost at the county level and was sentenced to jail, but was set free on bail for three years as the appeal made its way through the judicial system. In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the conviction on technical grounds as one of a series of decisions correcting the worst excesses of the McCarthy era.[26]

9.

One inadvertent legacy of the McCarthy years was the creation of Monthly Review Press. It all began with I. F. Stone's inability to find a publisher for his assessment of the official version of the Korean War. Written with humor and critical bite, the manuscript suggested that rather than being a case of simple unprovoked aggression from the North, the war—still underway at that time—had been "encouraged politically by silence, invited militarily by defensive formations, and

[25] "A Different Kind of Witness," *New Statesman and Nation,* 25 July 1953, 91.

[26] *Sweezy v New Hampshire* was the only Supreme Court decision of the 1950s to mention academic freedom, ironic given that Sweezy had not been employed by a university since leaving Harvard to enter military service in 1941. Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 380.

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finally set off by some minor lunges across the border," and that the truth about its precise origins lay somewhere "hidden in the murk of dispute between pro-Communists and anti-Communists."[27]

Stone had been a writer for the *New York Post* from 1933 to 1939, Washington correspondent of *The Nation* between 1940 and 1946, and writer for the New York dailies *PM,* the *Star,* and the *Daily Compass* from 1942 to 1952. That a journalist with his experience, ability, and ready-made audience was unable to get his book published was dramatic indication that in the realm of culture the Cold War had fallen to sub-zero temperatures. Sweezy and Huberman decided the book should see the light of day, and *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (1952) became the first title offered by Monthly Review Press.

When revisited in the 1960s and 1970s by students and scholars whose consciousness had been profoundly shaped by another war in Asia and who were less likely to accept the received wisdom of Cold War orthodoxy, books like Stone's won a reputation as hidden classics of critical scholarship. Stone's book also set a pattern for its publisher. In addition to issuing germinal works by Sweezy and Huberman, Monthly Review Press in its initial fifteen years tended to publish books that were critical of American foreign policy and unable to find a mainstream outlet, including Harvey O'Connor's *The Empire of Oil* (1955), Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957), and William Appleman Williams's *The United States, Cuba, and Castro* (1963).

That ostracized texts were its mainstay should not give the impression that Monthly Review Press was for "losers" from a publishing standpoint. Take *Fanshen* (1966) by William Hinton. Hinton had lived in China from 1947 to 1953, initially as a UN worker. Following the 1949 revolution, he observed land reform in a village, taking more than one thousand single-spaced pages of notes. When he returned home at the height of McCarthyism, his notes were promptly confiscated by customs officials. After a lengthy court battle, Hinton retrieved his notes in 1958 and immediately began writing while working as a truck mechanic in Philadelphia. He finished the book early in 1964 but spent three unsuccessful years showing it to trade publishers in Boston and New York. Some told him frankly that it was too political. After he gave it to Monthly Review Press, the cloth edition sold out rapidly, and paperback rights were contracted to Vintage, with royalties split evenly between Hinton and Monthly Review Press. Vintage sold a staggering two hundred thousand paper copies, and *Fanshen* is still in print to this day, now from the University of California Press.[28]

[27]I. F. Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1952), 44.

[28]William Hinton, telephone interview with author, 6 January 1999.

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Until the mid-1960s, Monthly Review Press was overseen by Huberman, a consummate organizer, but as it grew in size and Leo began experiencing health problems, he and Sweezy sought an additional hand. In 1967, they found what they were looking for in Harry Braverman (1920-1976). In the prior seven years, Braverman had risen from editor to vice-president and general manager of Grove Press in New York. Born and raised in Brooklyn, he had a background as a worker in the shipbuilding and steel industries, where he had been a union organizer and socialist activist. As a Trotskyist in the Socialist Workers Party in the 1940s and 1950s, Braverman was part of the subgroup led by Bert Cochran, heavily trade unionist in composition. When that group split with the SWP in 1953, Braverman edited its magazine the *American Socialist* until the group disbanded in 1960. (*Monthly Review* and the *American Socialist* published a joint issue, "American Labor Today," in July-August 1958.) This depth of working-class and socialist experience enabled Braverman to write his masterpiece, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), a brilliant criticism of managerial control and the eradication of skill from work, which became Monthly Review Press's all-time bestseller.[29]

In his ten years at the helm, Braverman put a creative stamp on Monthly Review Press. It became one of the leading publishers of radical books in the world, translating Marxist classics by the likes of Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolai Bukharin, and Karl Korsch, and issuing influential English-language titles such as Andre Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967), Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1968), Ernest Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory* (2 vols., 1970), Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* (1970), Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism* (1971), Louis Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972), Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America* (1973), Amilcar Cabral's *Return to the Source* (1973), Samir Amin's *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974), the anthology *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975) edited by Rayna Reiter, and Charles Bettelheim's *Class Struggles in the USSR* (2 vols., 1976).

Jules Geller (1913-1990), a comrade of Braverman's from the *American Socialist* who had worked at Grove Press and Random House, succeeded him as director of the press from 1976 until 1983. In the Geller years, the press published such important books as Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (4 vols., 1976-1990), E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), and Daniel Singer's *Road to Gdansk* (1981).

Geller was succeeded by Susan Lowes, who served as director through 1995. Lowes, who had come to MR with Braverman from Grove and had been managing editor under Geller, introduced

[29]John Bellamy Foster, "Introduction to the New Edition," *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, by Harry Braverman (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998): ix-xxiv.

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several much-appreciated series, including the New Feminist Library and Cornerstone Books. Monthly Review Press in her tenure continued to publish highly praised works, among them the collection *Powers of Desire* (1983) edited by Ann Snitnow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, Elizabeth Ewen's *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars* (1985), Cornel West's *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991), John Bellamy Foster's *The Vulnerable Planet* (1994), and *Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiques of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation* (1995).

Today, Monthly Review Press is governed by a hybrid of self-managed departments and a joint staff-board editorial committee; there is no single staff director. It continues to be a major publisher of significant writings by the editors of *Monthly Review* and other accomplished authors—Ellen Meiksins Wood, Daniel Singer, Paul Buhle, and Adolph Reed, to pluck just four names from the current season's catalogue.

10.

The growth of the press is reflective of a more general fact about the institution: once the Truman-Eisenhower decade was behind it, *Monthly Review* thrived in the atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s. Having endured a decade of intense repression, relative capitalist stability and growth, political quiescence, and liberal ideological consensus, *Monthly Review* served to provide an arc of continuity between the disintegration of the old left and the emergence of a new one.[30]

It is not easy to say whether *Monthly Review* was more old left or new, if a choice has to be made. Perhaps that is because the designations are, to an extent, contrivances. But it seems fair to say that *Monthly Review* was a journal of the old left that extended its sympathies to the new, that from the beginning it held certain beliefs identical to the new left's central tenets, and that it was further shaped over time by interaction with the movements and events of the 1960s, serving as one place of fusion for overlapping generations of the left.

Obviously the editors, readers, and contributors to *Monthly Review* were drawn primarily from the old left. Appearing in its pages in the 1950s were Carey McWilliams, Anne Braden, Agnes Smedley, Anna Louise Strong, Edgar Snow, Stanley Moore, and Joseph Starobin, as well as the occasional luminary from abroad, such as Jean-Paul Sartre. A column by the eclectic independent radical Scott Nearing, "World Events," ran from 1953 to 1972, and a number of contributors from old left backgrounds, such as Annette Rubinstein and Carl Marzani, continued to write for the magazine into the 1990s. *Monthly Review*'s editors, of course, differed

[30]For one early recognition of this, see Peter Clecak, "Introduction," *Monthly Review: Volume 1, 1949-1950* (New York: Greenwood, 1968).

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with the sort of new leftists who were skeptical about socialism or who associated Marxism with economic crudity.[31]

On the other hand, the magazine had several new left traits. In 1956, *Monthly Review*'s editors were stunned by the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Khrushchev revelations about the extent of Stalin's crimes. They responded immediately to the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, were inspired by the ensuing civil rights movement, and published writings in the 1950s and early 1960s by W. E. B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham, Oliver Cromwell Cox, James and Grace Lee Boggs, Conrad Lynn, and Lorraine Hansberry, as well as an interview with Malcolm X in 1964. The magazine's principled independence from party control anticipated the culture of the new left, and its policies of opposing redbaiting and extending aid to anyone on the left were compatible with the principles of inclusiveness and "anti-anti-communism" promulgated by an early new left trying to work its way out of the dead end of Cold War liberalism.

No wonder, then, that the magazine was embraced by a good part of the new left as indispensable reading. Indeed, since the magazine was so obviously an outgrowth of the experience of an older left, it is surprising how early some quintessential writers of the new left enter into its pages. Staughton Lynd and William Appleman Williams began writing for *Monthly Review* in 1952—not, say, 1962, when one might expect to see their names. C. Wright Mills wrote on psychology for *Monthly Review* in 1958. In the following two years the editors ran articles by Raymond Williams and Ralph Miliband, introducing them to an American readership that had almost certainly not yet heard of their sort of British socialism. "He was always a little detached, and he rarely 'belonged' to any fraction or section," wrote E. P. Thompson of Raymond Williams upon his death. "He told me once, in the late 1960s, that he then felt closest to the American *Monthly Review*."[32]

[31]Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties* (Toronto: Bantam, 1987), 125, recounts Richard Flacks's memory of a chance conversation with Huberman soon after the Students for a Democratic Society's 1962 Port Huron convention, in which Huberman reportedly was scornful of SDS for not being sufficiently socialist. In return, the new left sometimes stigmatized the magazine's economic coverage. Staughton Lynd, referring to the 1950s, for example, wrote, "Year after year one read *Monthly Review* editorials predicting imminent economic collapse and essays in *Dissent* which once again explained the quiescence of industrial workers." But that spoke more to a new left image of the old left than to the actual record. A more accurate assessment was made by Lewis Coser: "But as distinct from a number of other Marxist publications, *Monthly Review* did not indulge in periodic speculations about an impending crisis of the capitalist economy." Lynd, "The Prospects of the New Left," in *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism*, ed. John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1974), 714; Coser, "USA: Marxists at Bay," in *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, ed. Leopold Labedz (New York: Praeger, 1962), 354.

[32]E. P. Thompson, "Lost Dispatches from the Border Country," *The Nation*, 5 March 1988, 310.

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From a very early moment, in other words, *Monthly Review* was able to connect with the new left at home and abroad. As Nina Serrano recollects, the magazine was part of the changes blowing in the wind in Madison, Wisconsin, as early as the late 1950s:

> Another editor, the economist Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review*, came to speak off-campus; although he reached only the leftist students, his influence was profound. Most of us left his reception as subscribers to *Monthly Review*. For the next few years, articles from that magazine were often the center of lively discussion. (Sweezy's co-editor was Leo Huberman, whose book, *Man's Worldly Goods*, I'd found very moving in my teens. When I met Leo in the 1960s, a year or so before he died, I felt affirmed to find such a kindly and warm man.)[33]

One convergence of the magazine and the young radicals was on foreign policy. *Monthly Review*, like the new left, was shaped in opposition to the Cold War and its hot skirmishes. Long before most Americans had ever heard of Vietnam, even before the war had become a fully American war, the editors accurately prophesied the direction of the conflict in Southeast Asia: "Are we going to take the position that anti-Communism justifies anything, including colonialism, interference in the affairs of other countries, and aggression? That way, let us be perfectly clear about it, lies war and more war leading ultimately to full-scale national disaster."[34] Likewise, the special July-August 1960 issue, "Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution," later issued as a book, was a very early, timely portrait of changes on the island after the first of several visits by Huberman and Sweezy following the 1959 revolution. It was considered indispensable reading by many young radicals intrigued by the possibility that Cuba represented a departure from conventional Communism and the American empire alike.

As the decade took shape, other new left names made their appearance: James Weinstein (1963), Todd Gitlin (1964), Carl Ogelsby (1966). There were writings by the likes of Ronald Radosh and David Horowitz, who later turned to the right, and by those, like Noam Chomsky, who have stayed the course. As a popularly written revolutionary socialist magazine produced by intellectuals, *Monthly Review* held appeal for a student new left that was highly educated but often failed to produce much in the way of intellectual material of its own, and correspondingly it attracted new left writers who sought a serious outlet for their analyses. Indeed, the new left immediately adopted Sweezy and Baran's *Monopoly Capital* (1966), writes Joanne Barkan,

[33]Nina Serrano, "A Madison Bohemian," in *History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950-1970*, ed. Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 75.

[34]Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, "What Every American Should Know About Indo-China," *Monthly Review* 6 (June 1954): 70-71. The editors' major writings on the subject were collected in Paul M. Sweezy, Leo Huberman, and Harry Magdoff, *Vietnam: The Endless War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

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"as a standard text—one of those books 'everyone' read or discussed in a study group or recommended to radical friends."[35]

The magazine's stance toward the working class in the advanced capitalist countries was as complicated as the new left's. The leading *Monthly Review* writers on the subject—Huberman, Sweezy, and Braverman—attempted as Marxists to come to terms with the American working class's postwar conservatism, while holding out the possibility of eventual working-class radicalization. But in some not-insignificant instances, writers for the magazine wrote off organized labor as absorbed within the system and looked elsewhere for sources of revolutionary change. In a much-discussed special issue of 1963, for example, James Boggs maintained that "the workers themselves have drawn the curtain on the era of the union," which has "outlived its usefulness," and that trade unions are "today fulfilling the same functions for the American state as the Russian trade unions do for the Russian state." This message—that class struggle would have to take place outside and against unions—was all the more powerful in that it was delivered by an eloquent revolutionary black industrial worker.[36]

11.

The American left's turn toward socialism and revolution in the last years of the 1960s and early 1970s was contradictory, combining reasoned recognition of the impossibility of liberation under capitalism with reckless tendencies toward adventurism and sectarian fratricide. The astute and the pathological in that moment cannot be conveniently separated out. It can be said, however, that the new level of radicalization—partially propelled by a black liberation struggle which looked to anti-colonial and Marxist movements abroad, and energized by the worldwide eruptions of 1968—further stimulated *Monthly Review*'s growth. As many turned to revolutionary Marxism between 1968 and 1973, believing it to provide a framework for comprehending world events and a compelling guide to political action, and as the organizational crack-up of the new left prompted a substantial minority of activists to seek out more serious Marxist analysis and socialist politics, *Monthly Review*'s paid circulation rose to 9,072 in 1970 and peaked at 11,500 in 1977.

[35]Joanne Barkan, "A Blast from the Past," *Dissent* 44 (spring 1997): 95.

[36]Presciently, Boggs anticipated that "outsiders," the chronically unemployed in urban centers, would prove an explosive group. But his sweeping judgments against trade unions, even against radical rank-and-file caucuses within unions ("merely taking over the union today would gain them very little"), were disarming to a new left already predisposed to dismiss the labor movement. James Boggs, "The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook," *Monthly Review* 15 (July-August 1963): 27-28, 32, 56. On this subject, see also Paul Sweezy, "Marx and the Proletariat," *Monthly Review* 19 (December 1967): 25-43.

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The magazine's growing appeal in the late 1960s and early 1970s stemmed in part from the mass movement against the Vietnam War, which prompted younger readers to seek a more sophisticated analysis of imperialism. The hunger of students for answers as to why the United States was at war in Southeast Asia was, in fact, what stimulated Harry Magdoff to write the set of articles for the magazine compiled in his popular book *The Age of Imperialism* (1969). Opposing mainstream dismissals of an economic basis for U.S. foreign policy as well as crude interpretations of interventions abroad as the result of strict balance-sheet measurements of material interests in specific countries, Magdoff argued that imperialism was not a chosen policy but part of the very essence of a capitalist society, an international system that inevitably gave rise to the desire to keep open the option of investment the world over.[37]

When Magdoff joined Sweezy as co-editor after the death of Huberman, the bond further strengthened both the magazine's economic coverage and its already-impressive commitment to the analysis of imperialism and third world issues. In the 1960s and 1970s, Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and others associated with *Monthly Review* extended the dependency theory that Paul Baran had initiated, arguing that the third world was underdeveloped not because it was pre-capitalist or pre-modern but because of capitalism itself: modern imperialism. The spectacular wealth of the North and destitution of the South were not unrelated; the third world lagged behind because it was the integral periphery of a capitalist system, not because it hadn't yet reached a magical "take-off" point. Only a revolutionary breakaway from empire could free the third world from underdevelopment. These positions won *Monthly Review* a worldwide readership and esteem. Many MR readers had experiences like that of Allen Young, who had taken a course from Baran at Stanford and found that he could drop Baran's name "in leftist circles anywhere in South America and win instant admiration and respect."[38]

As the new left in the United States grew more aware of the extent of armed struggles in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, *Monthly Review* was also looked to as a source about national liberation struggles and revolutionary strategy. One influential document was "Revolution in the Revolution?"—a book-length explanation of guerrilla techniques by Regis Debray that appeared as a special issue in summer 1967 and was followed the next summer by another special issue, full of highly critical replies to Debray. Of the editors' own assessments of political developments in Latin America, particularly poignant were their essays on Chile following the election of socialist Salvador Allende,

[37]Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
[38]Allen Young, *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1981), 66.

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whose inauguration Sweezy and Ortiz attended. The editors were among those to call upon the Chilean administration to develop an armed popular counterweight to the military before a coup led to the tragic massacre of virtually the entire Chilean left, including Allende, in 1973.[39]

12.

Perhaps the greatest dilemma that the twentieth century presented for revolutionary socialists was the emergence of states like the Soviet Union, formed after massive revolutionary upsurges, different in class structure, ideology, and social organization from capitalism, but lacking in working-class democracy. How did *Monthly Review* come to terms with this defining problem?

In one sense, the editors' definition of socialism remained constant across fifty years: to them it was the negation of capitalism, a thoroughgoing transformation of property relations, the abolition of private profit as the organizing principle of production. While seeking reforms in the here and now, *Monthly Review* has thus been decidedly to the left of social democratic reformism, opposed to political collaboration with capitalist institutions and imperialism as self-defeating compromises.

Within that general position, however, *Monthly Review*'s definition of socialism has matured considerably. In their founding editorial statement, "Where We Stand," the editors considered public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy and comprehensive planning to be the essence of socialism. While they reserved the right to be critical of any country, they believed socialism had been achieved in the Soviet Union with the first Five-Year Plan and wrote confidently of "an actually functioning socialist system which grows in strength and vigor with every year that passes."[40]

Over time, however, the editors came in effect to hold that public ownership and planning were necessary, rather than sufficient, conditions for socialism. One cause for the shift was a more critical disposition toward the Soviet Union beginning in 1956. After tanks rolled into Hungary, the editors wrote, "Any claim the Soviet Union had to moral leadership of the world socialist movement is now extinguished." *Monthly Review* did not consider such episodes illustrative of revolutionary expansion, as did the State Department and Communists alike, but the reverse. By the mid-1960s the editors were prepared to maintain that the Soviet Union had become a depoliticized

[39]These editorials are collected in Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, eds., *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Chile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

[40]Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "Where We Stand," *Monthly Review* 1 (May 1949): 1-2; Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "The Communist Manifesto After 100 Years," *Monthly Review* 1 (August 1949): 113.

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and thus non-revolutionary society, highly stratified, "with a deep chasm between the ruling stratum of political bureaucrats and economic managers on the one side and the mass of people on the other."[41]

This pronounced criticism of bureaucratically administered societies brought the editors back to the challenge made by Albert Einstein in *Monthly Review*'s premier issue:

> . . . A planned economy is not yet socialism. A planned economy as such may be accompanied by the complete enslavement of the individual. The achievement of socialism requires the solution of some extremely difficult socio-political problems: how is it possible, in view of the far-reaching centralization of political and economic power, to prevent bureaucracy from becoming all-powerful and overweening? How can the rights of the individual be protected and therewith a democratic counterweight to the power of bureaucracy be assured?[42]

Like Einstein, the editors—especially Sweezy, who wrote most extensively on such issues—came to conclude that socialism demanded "a society in which the actual producers dominate the conditions and results of their productive activity," as Sweezy put it in a celebrated exchange with the French Marxist Charles Bettelheim.[43]

By this understanding, social systems like those in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were transitional—beyond capitalism but not yet socialist. Actually, many were backtracking toward capitalism, as typified by renewed emphasis on the market as regulator. Others, the editors hoped, were heading in a more progressive direction, primarily Cuba and China. China's Cultural Revolution was perceived by the editors as a model response to the danger of emergent privileged strata in post-revolutionary societies, and they followed Che Guevara in advocating moral or collective incentives as alternatives to coercion or individual acquisitiveness.[44]

This particular sensibility prompted the editors to be critical of Eurocommunism as a strategy for the 1970s, to oppose market socialism as both a theory in the West and a strategy for countries like Tito's Yugoslavia and Deng's China, and to resist the claim that the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-1992 signified the end of socialism. It also led both Huberman and Sweezy to object, in different ways, to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which Huberman declared "morally,

[41]Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "Assessing the Damage," *Monthly Review* 8 (October 1956): 259; Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "Lessons of Soviet Experience," *Monthly Review* 19 (November 1967): 11.

[42]Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?," 14-15.

[43]Paul M. Sweezy, "Reply," *Monthly Review* 22 (December 1970): 16.

[44]See especially Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "The Cultural Revolution in China," *Monthly Review* 18 (January 1967): 1-17. Sweezy's writings on post-revolutionary societies include *On the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), with Charles Bettelheim; *Post-Revolutionary Society* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); and "Cuba: A Left U.S. View," *Monthly Review* 42 (September 1990): 17-21.

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politically, ideologically" a disaster. In 1982, Sweezy protested the suppression of the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc, saying that the episode proved "beyond any shadow of a doubt" that "the Communist regimes of the Soviet bloc have become the expression and the guardians of a new rigidified hierarchical structure which has nothing in common with the kind of socialist society Marxists have always regarded as the goal of modern working-class movements." In 1989, looking back at the magazine's original "Where We Stand" editorial, Sweezy and Magdoff stood by most of the propositions but added the express stipulation that "to grow and develop and realize its potentialities socialism must be democratic in the root sense of the word."[45]

The magazine's evolving assessment of socialism reflects many of the traits that have made *Monthly Review* so valued by its readers, particularly its ability to change with experience and its unflagging commitment to the abolition of capitalism. Many readers disagreed, more or less sharply, with the magazine's stances over the years toward various Communist countries. Some found *Monthly Review* to side too uncritically with one or another sector of the Communist world, while others found even its most subdued criticisms of such states and their policies unwarranted. But few doubted the independence and integrity of its editors' judgments.[46]

13.

What has caused *Monthly Review* to win such respect on the broad left and in wider circles? At least five characteristics leap to mind:

First, its plain, no-nonsense Marxism. From the beginning, the tone of *Monthly Review* was temperate and modest, of rational rather than religious disposition. Its distinctive mode of intellectual production—a voluntarily subsidized instititution dependent upon neither university nor party—has helped to keep its pages relatively free of jargon, dogma, and cant. Dedicated to intelligibility, informative but not pedantic, sophisticated in thought but simple and modest in style, the magazine strove for clarity and probity. As Huberman wrote in 1950, "Agitation, based on information, brings lasting converts to socialism; agitation, based on exhortation, does not."[47] The editors' rational

[45]Leo Huberman, "A Disaster," *Monthly Review* 20 (October 1968): 1; Paul Sweezy, "The Suppression of the Polish Workers Movement," *Monthly Review* 34 (January 1983): 30; "Notes from the Editors," *Monthly Review* 40 (January 1989), inside back cover.

[46]A famous criticism was Irving Howe's much-reproduced "New Styles in 'Leftism,'" *Dissent* 12 (summer 1965): 295-323, which labeled *Monthly Review* "the authoritarian left." The editors never replied, but for a useful response to Howe, see Hal Draper, "In Defense of the 'New Radicals,'" *New Politics* 4 (summer 1965): 5-28.

[47]Leo Huberman, "Notes on Left Propaganda," *Monthly Review* 2 (September 1950): 155-160; see also his "How to Spread the Word," *Monthly Review* 19 (December 1967): 44-51.

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disposition was reflected in the magazine's openness to a broad range of Marxist points of view, as well as to radical thinkers who worked outside of Marxism but were not hostile to it. *Monthly Review*'s editors, even more honorably, recognized their fallibility. They were willing to admit their own errors and change their views from time to time to account for a world that had surprised their expectations. Even those who have found reason to disagree with them on one point or another will concede that the editors of *Monthly Review* never held to any position for reasons of vanity or dogma.

Second, its exemplary courage. The editors of *Monthly Review* stand in the front ranks of American dissenters in the second half of the twentieth century. It takes strength of character to admit one's mistakes, it takes guts to be critical of governments and movements with which one has historically been in sympathy, and it takes courage to hold to socialist principles for fifty years against the relentless reproach of conventional society. *Monthly Review* stayed the course from the McCarthy era through the Reagan years, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the "end of history." It has steadily and without fear championed the interests of the hungry, the dispossessed, and the great majority of humankind against capitalism, racism, and other forms of oppression. Its editors, every one of them highly educated, talented, and accomplished, could have chosen easier, more respectable, and more lucrative careers. But they stuck to their commitments with tenacity, despite the considerable pressures of the long haul, the fickleness of fashion, and the complacency that sometimes sets in with the passing of time.

Third, its astute practicing of political economy. Prior to the mid-1960s, *Monthly Review* was practically the only place "the interested reader could turn for an indigenous American Marxist economics," as Herbert Gintis once wrote. Sometimes it still seems that way. Yet the value of *Monthly Review*'s economic writing is not a function of scarcity so much as distinction. The training and expertise of Sweezy, Baran, and Magdoff was and is formidable. Their writings are important not merely for conveying unique theses about the twentieth-century economy. *Monthly Review*'s economic writing sets a commendable example simply in its general sensibility, which has avoided the economic profession's descent into model-building, technicality, and mathematical abstraction, not to mention the absurdities of "rational choice" theory and free-market dogma. Its editors have avoided the academic Marxist drift to theory by engaging reality, handling statistics deftly, evaluating economic arguments shrewdly, and relating economic phenomena to a holistic view of society, politics, and culture.[48]

[48]Herbert Gintis, "The Reemergence of Marxian Economics in America," *The Left Academy*, ed. Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 53. On *Monthly Review*'s influence upon economics, see Lawrence Lifschultz, "Could Karl Marx Teach Economics in America?" *Ramparts*, April 1974, 27-30, 52-5; and Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York: Basic, 1987), 176-180.

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Fourth, its ability to put the present into perspective. Assessment of momentary events is an extremely challenging type of Marxist writing, perhaps the most challenging, and *Monthly Review*'s editors have been extremely adept at it. They have avoided theoretical fads and navel-gazing, and have cultivated a long view of history. The volumes of the magazine comprise nothing less than a running assessment of capitalist reality—in many instances, an account of enduring value. Consider Sweezy's explanation in the very first issue of why policymakers will not switch to beneficial social spending over military expenditure as a means of stabilizing the economy. Arms spending was perfectly rational to the ruling class, he observed, since it brings healthy profits and does not have the drawbacks, from capital's standpoint, of redistributing income or enhancing the social confidence of working people. Fifty years later, this resonates not merely as a useful historical theory of the Cold War state but as a living explanation for why military spending has remained so high even after the disappearance of the Soviet pretext.[49]

Fifth, its proven internationalism. Although "Where We Stand" expressed the view that the foremost responsibility of American socialists was to focus upon the prospects of socialism in the United States, *Monthly Review* quickly came to have a world reach, propelled by its interest in revolutionary developments abroad and its recognition that the postwar capitalist system orchestrated by the United States was global in scope. As Henry Luce, founder of *Time, Life,* and *Fortune,* put it in 1941, the twentieth century was to be the "American century." *Monthly Review* not only opposed U.S. military, economic, and political domination over other peoples, but was highly attentive to developments in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East on their own terms. The magazine won attention the world over, from India to Guatemala. It printed original contributions by Che Guevara, Carlos Fuentes, and Eduardo Galeano, and revolutionaries abroad organized editions of the magazine in four other languages: Spanish (1963-1970, 1977), Italian (1968-1987), Greek (1973-1975, 1983, 1987-1988), and German (1974-1975). No other magazine has played the same role in educating American radicals about struggles and developments abroad, and no other periodical of the American left has achieved such a degree of international prestige—a level of identification and respect so great that revolutionaries abroad have often looked upon MR as *their* magazine.[50]

[49]Paul Sweezy, "Recent Developments in American Capitalism," *Monthly Review* 1 (May 1949): 16-21.

[50]In my process of formulating the above five points, I found useful Michael Tanzer's remarks at the magazine's thirtieth anniversary celebration in 1979, tape recording, Oral History of the American Left, although he put matters differently.

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14.

Despite these attributes and achievements, no one should take the historic milestone of fifty years for granted. Only a tiny number of Marxist publications have lasted longer, among them the academic quarterly *Science & Society*, established in 1936. Just about every one of the dangers that finished off other radical periodicals—financial trouble, government harassment, an editor's death, the waning of movements—have beset *Monthly Review*. At every step, the magazine has had to fight to exist against problems large and small. It has had to replenish itself repeatedly against the natural attrition of subscribers. Its primary readership has been an American left that has more often than not been in a shambles. Not every issue has come out on time, and even in the most favorable periods, cash-flow crises have sometimes necessitated emergency appeals. Without question, the central issue facing *Monthly Review* today is the very same one that it faced from the beginning: survival.

Still, *Monthly Review* is not just any radical periodical. It is something of a socialist Noah's ark—two Pauls, two Harrys, two Hubermans, a boat that allowed socialists to outlive an ideological flood that all but extinguished hopes for radical social change. There is a sense in which the tale of *Monthly Review* is nothing less than the history of the whole of the American left during the period of the magazine's existence. In its pages you will find many of the great weaknesses of the American left: exaggeration of the threat of domestic fascism, writing off of the labor unions, mistaken hopes invested in faraway states, inflated revolutionary estimations. You will also find the left's virtues: opposition to racism and gender oppression, uncompromising internationalism, class solidarity, courage and integrity, flexibility and intelligence, dedication to the interests of the most exploited, hard-headed analysis, egalitarian and democratic aspirations.

Much has changed in fifty years, starting with the quarters. Call it paradoxical, but *Monthly Review* has never existed very far from Wall Street, Madison Avenue, or Midtown's glittering monuments to capital. It has, however, moved frequently, first leaving the Huberman apartment at 66 Barrow Street (1949-1951) to settle at 218 West 10th Street (1951-1961), then sharing space with *The Nation* at 333 Sixth Avenue (1961-1966). These were but the first stops on an inexorable Manhattan march northward to 116 West 14th Street (1966-1974), 62 West 14th Street (1974-1982), and 155 West 23rd Street (1982-1987), finally coming to a halt at its present commodious location on the tenth floor at 122 West 27th Street. The office's movement might be taken as a metaphor for the tireless engagement that has always characterized *Monthly Review*, which has kept alive to the world, never resting.

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Take, for example, the prolific economic writings of Magdoff and Sweezy in the past three decades. The editors collaborated on numerous articles and books that sought to illuminate patterns of slow growth that returned to the advanced industrial economies after the long post-Second World War boom came to an end in the early 1970s. Especially innovative was their explanation of what they called the "financial explosion"—the vast expansion of debt, credit, and monetary and financial markets, extending from Wall Street to the third world. The editors have viewed these developments as a byproduct of stagnation within production as capital sought alternative outlets, a process that has to some extent counteracted stagnation but is ultimately producing greater instability as the system takes on an increasingly speculative character. Because they located these problems within the capital accumulation process itself, the editors, against conventional economic wisdom, continued to maintain that reforms would be inadequate to solve structural problems that can only be redressed by the elimination of capitalist rule.

The Reagan-Bush-Clinton years may have confirmed some of the editors' basic economic forecasts, but they were years of defeat and retreat for the left. Despite the unfavorable odds, *Monthly Review* met new challenges with fresh thinking—responding in 1984, for example, to the growth of liberation theology in Latin America and faith-based radicalism in the United States with a popular special issue on "Religion and the Left." It devoted substantial attention to the Sandinista Revolution and Palestinian intifada, the Bernie Sanders and Jesse Jackson campaigns, and the growing crisis of the world environment. And it published important original material by journalist Christopher Hitchens, anti-war activist Daniel Ellsberg, scientists Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins, labor activists Bill Fletcher and Jane Slaughter, historians Eric Foner, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Marilyn B. Young, social critics Cornel West and Manning Marable, and economist Doug Henwood, among others.

Recently, *Monthly Review* has enjoyed a modest but discernable renewal. The magazine's circulation bottomed out at 4,853 in 1996, the culmination of twenty years of retreat for the left, the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the apparent triumph of centrist politics and neoliberal economics. But a series of initiatives have reversed that trend, beginning with the retooling of the summer issue into a concentrated annual exploration of such important contemporary themes as capitalism and the information age, the new pulse in worldwide labor, and ecology and agriculture. *Monthly Review* also gained a new editor when, after a lengthy search to establish continuity for their project by finding someone from a younger generation whose approach was consistent with *Monthly Review*'s long-run perspective and with whom they believed they could

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work constructively, Sweezy and Magdoff invited the Marxist scholar Ellen Meiksins Wood, author of *The Retreat from Class* (1986), to join them as co-editor in 1997. Paid circulation has grown in every recent year, reaching 5,795 last year, its highest number since 1991. As if to symbolize these changes, the magazine in 1998 experienced the first redesign in its history, with an enlarged cover, page size, and typeface.

New readers, a new format, new vitality, a new editor: the changes, in a way, only serve to underscore the continuities of principle. The magazine's initial politics, far from being outmoded, may never have been more relevant. In a sense, with Stalinism discredited and social democracy indistinguishable in practice from capitalism, we are all—all of us who remain on the left of the left—independent socialists now. While the global rivulets of the Marxist movement are weakened, they have, even in their organized expressions, the advantage of being far more heterogenous, pluralist, and egalitarian in their modes of solidarity than their counterparts were at midcentury. Most activists and thinkers on the American left have accepted the need for considerate, democratic interaction with those from other traditions and perspectives. Since fostering these values was the original purpose of *Monthly Review,* and since the inequalities and instabilities of capitalism and empire still generate a desperate need for far-reaching social reconstruction, there is every reason to hope that *Monthly Review* will continue to serve in the coming millennium just as it has for fifty years: as the flagship journal of an American Marxism in solidarity with liberation struggles the world over.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL M. SWEEZY

A founding editor of *Monthly Review*, Paul Sweezy has made widely recognized contributions to economics, history, and political analysis.

Born in 1910 in New York City, son of a Wall Street bank executive, Sweezy attended Philips Exeter Academy and Harvard University, where he was president of the *Harvard Crimson*, graduating in 1931. He spent the 1932-1933 academic year at the London School of Economics, where he was exposed to Marxism, and returned to Harvard as a graduate student. He received his Ph.D. in 1937, and his dissertation, *Monopoly and Competition in the English Coal Trade, 1550-1800,* was published by Harvard University Press the following year. Sweezy taught economics at Harvard for five years until, in the year of publication of his work *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (Oxford University Press, 1942), he joined the research and analysis division of the Office of Strategic Services, wartime forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, for which he edited the classified *European Political Report.* Returning to the United States in fall 1945, Sweezy decided that, faced with the certitude of being denied tenure, he should resign from Harvard. In 1946, he received a grant from the Social Sciences Research Council and took up residence in New Hampshire, where he wrote *Socialism* (McGraw-Hill, 1949).

Sweezy's subsequent books were all published by Monthly Review Press. He is co-author of *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (1960) and *Socialism in Cuba* (1969), with Leo Huberman; *Monopoly Capital* (1966), with Paul A. Baran; and *The Dynamics of U.S. Capitalism* (1970), *The End of Prosperity* (1977), *The Deepening Crisis of U.S. Capitalism* (1980), *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (1987), and *The Irreversible Crisis* (1988), all with Harry Magdoff. His articles and lectures are collected in *The Present as History* (1953), *Modern Capitalism and Other Essays* (1972), *Post-Revolutionary Society* (1980), and *Four Lectures on Marxism* (1981).

This interview is a composite drawn from three sessions conducted by Christopher Phelps in tape-recorded telephone conversations in 1997 and 1999, and seven sessions conducted by Andros Skotnes for the Columbia University Oral History Project in 1986 and 1987.

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ESTABLISHING THE MAGAZINE

Q: Not to put too fine a point on it, but how could you and Leo Huberman believe that a socialist magazine would go anywhere in 1949, given the situation? The left was under attack and unraveling. The loyalty oaths had already been instituted. You understand what I mean: the times did not seem auspicious for the founding of an independent socialist journal.

SWEEZY: The circumstances did not seem altogether favorable, did they? Leo and I both felt very strongly that the ideas of socialism were being neglected, or lost sight of, or misrepresented in American intellectual life. We thought of it as a kind of holding action, a rear-guard action, but we thought that something should be done to keep continuity to the older traditions of Marxist socialist thought in this country. And we didn't know exactly what we were going to do, anyway—Leo and I and some other people. I can't say that we were confident that it would take hold, yet we did have hope. We thought it would be a viable thing to do, and it turned out that we were right.

Q: Let me ask about Huberman and your relations with him. It seems to me from reading both of your works that each of you had different strengths, and that there might have been an informal division of labor between you. He was more of a popularizer, and he also appears. . . .

SWEEZY: He was a much better businessman than I was.

Q: Was he?

SWEEZY: Oh, yes. He could do that kind of thing. He had a real flair for it. Leo could have been a very good businessman if he'd gone into business. He had all of the talents which I haven't got at all. I'm a mess as far as doing anything in an organized way.

I was, I suppose, more of a theorist than Leo. Leo was a good solid left-wing person, and he kept up on the news, but he was not someone who developed ideas. That was my department, I think. For years, I wrote most of the Reviews of the Month. I didn't write them all, but I wrote a great majority of them. Every once in a while, Leo wrote one of them. We consulted about what the subject would be, how we would handle it, and so on. But the drafting would normally be my responsibility.

Leo was in charge of all the business and administrative aspects. You see, I was up in New Hampshire. I went down to New York once a month—that was mostly on writing editorials and reading the manu-

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scripts that came in. He was very busy with all of the details of the bureaucracy that comes with running a magazine—fulfilling subscriptions and that kind of thing. He made up the paper. He sent it to the printer. It's a full-time job. He wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of Gerty, his wife. She was a trained accountant. She kept the books. And Sybil Huntington May, who actually lived with Huberman in summers in Martha's Vineyard, in a cottage up there—all five of us stayed in a small complex of houses—kept the Associates' books and supervised the subscription list. So that was the original bureaucracy: Gerty, Leo, Sybil. [*Laughs.*]

Q: How did you decide upon the name *Monthly Review*?

SWEEZY: Well, we spent a long, long time after it became a real possibility looking for some kind of a title which would be suitable for what we had in mind. We had a long list of suggested titles and finally decided that there was no sense in prejudicing things in advance by calling it socialist or revolutionary or anything of that kind, although we did put in the subtitle, "An Independent Socialist Magazine."

Q: Do you recall what "independent" meant to you?

SWEEZY: Independent from a political line dictated by somebody else.

BECOMING A MARXIST

Q: Was there anything in your family background or your experience at Exeter that prepared you to be a radical?

SWEEZY: No—well, yes, in one sense: my father was a freethinker and an extreme liberal.

Q: A freethinker in the religious sense?

SWEEZY: Yes. I remember very vividly as a child the times after we went to Sunday school and my father and mother went to church, more or less pro forma, as a matter of sociability, then coming home for a big Sunday dinner. My grandmother—my mother's mother—was living with us, and she was a very devout and literal Methodist. She believed everything that was in the Bible, and my father didn't believe anything that wasn't plausible. He would argue with her, and they'd get into these arguments. I never took part, but I would listen. All the same, I thought, "He's right, he's right!" About the whale swallowing Jonah—I just couldn't see all that. So my father's free-

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thinking, I'm sure, predisposed me to being non-dogmatic about everything.

I did vote for Norman Thomas in 1932.

Q: That was at Harvard.

SWEEZY: That's right. But that was entirely a protest. If you didn't want either Roosevelt or Hoover, the obvious protest vote was Norman Thomas. It wasn't based on any acceptance of his political positions, particularly. And it was only after I got to the London School of Economics in the next year, the '32-'33 academic year, that I got exposed to radical views.

Q: How exactly did that happen?

SWEEZY: Well, it's a little hard to say. The London School in those days was the center for people from all over the British empire. And Harold Laski, of course, was the star political scientist, or whatever they called them in those days. I used to go to his Thursday evening soirées sometimes. He was very much of a British Labour Party loyalist, and that always acted as a kind of limit on the extent to which his Marxism could turn in a revolutionary direction, although the Great Depression was his most radical phase. I was somewhat influenced by his historical writing. But it was mostly under the influence of his graduate students, some of whom were Communists, some Trotskyists—every possible stripe of radical, many quite brilliant—that I shifted from being a sort of iconoclast about traditional U.S. economics and going through a phase of interest in the Austrian School to a much more radical position. I just began to absorb these ways of thinking from conversations with these students, some of whom were much more educated than the faculty.

The economic situation, you have to remember, was really a disaster. There wasn't any clear theory of why it had happened, or where things were going, which commanded any wide support at the time. Keynes was already, of course, an extremely prominent figure, had been ever since the First World War. His *Treatise on Money*, I think, was published in 1930, and before I left Harvard I studied Keynes very carefully. We studied Hayek, and we would pull between these various views, trying to understand what was happening. That was the state of mind in which I was amenable to Marxist explanations of what was going on. When I was first exposed to it, a whole new light fell on a lot of things—not just that there was a crisis of capitalism but that this was part of the downfall of a system.

Then I read Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, and that did it. A brilliant book.

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Q: So that was the book that really tipped the scales?

SWEEZY: Yes, I think so, as far as the Russian Revolution was concerned. I really didn't know anything about the Russian Revolution, but here was this very exciting account of a tremendous historical drama. Then I had to learn something about Marxism, and I began after that to read, to think, during the next few years, particularly after I got back to the United States in the fall of 1933. I began to educate myself in a more serious way. At that time, things had begun to change at Harvard, too. There was a beginning of an intellectual process in the U.S. universities which had not really started before. There were radicals around. But Marxism throughout most of the 1930s was very marginal in all of the centers of intellectual activity in the United States. I'd say most of us were in the process of teaching ourselves to have some kind of sophistication in the area.

OBTAINING AN HISTORICAL OUTLOOK

Q: How would you characterize your association with Joseph Schumpeter?

SWEEZY: I was his assistant in the first-year graduate course in economic theory for one or two years, but the relationship was largely personal and quite many-sided. We were on very good terms, even though we were at opposite ends of the political spectrum. By the time I got back to Cambridge in '33-'34, I considered myself to be a Marxist. I went to Schumpeter's graduate seminar at that time and found him very respectful of Marxism. I mean, Schumpeter was a very conservative person, basically. We were poles apart. But he was never dull, and he more or less deliberately set himself to build a structure of thought which was rival to Marx. In other words, he took Marx as model, in a way. He had great admiration for Marx. In all of his works he treats Marx with a seriousness that is completely foreign to the way Anglo-American economics treated Marx and has to this day. Even though I didn't agree with him, he was a good person to argue with, to talk to, and his historical knowledge was enormous, of course.

Q: Yes, one thing that interests me about him is his belief in the importance of history as part of the study of economics. I'm wondering whether you drew upon that, or whether it just came out of your Marxism, because your economic thought has always been historical.

SWEEZY: Yes, that's true. I don't know if I can put it in a formula, but I was always pretty skeptical about the marginal utility stuff and

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individualism, but I hadn't put it into anything in the way of another view until I came to Marx. There it all fell into place right away. It takes time to get internalized, however, and to become not only something that you agree with, but that you use in your thinking, that automatically is a part of the way you see things, part of the way you approach problems. That's something very different from merely accepting principles or formulas, whether you internalize them and use them.

Increasingly, I became convinced that social science is really history. That's the subject matter of social science. You can't split it up into economics and politics and social problems. They're all intertwined. You have to concentrate on certain problems, certain questions. But to separate them out and make a distinct field came to me to seem to make impossible a really scientific—in the sense of a search for genuine knowledge—approach to social phenomena. It has to be historical at bottom. Marxism is the only approach which makes possible such a coordinated, integrated view of the historical process, and historical materialism in that sense is the basis of all social science.

It's easy to accept formulas. It's very hard to think the way Marx thought, for whom formulas were not really of any great importance. The tendency of the falling rate of profit, the forces of production and the relations of production, modes of production—all of these things are easily formulated as schemas or models, which is very dangerous because you find yourself being guided by seemingly established truths which become the reality rather than simply a guide to the way you organize your thoughts and your researches and so on. When Marx came to doing his own interpretations, his major historical essays—particularly *The Eighteenth Brumaire, Class Struggles in France, The Civil War in France*—you don't find any formularistic thinking. Those were the best known of his historical studies, but, of course, history permeates everything he wrote. Going back to his earliest works, which he and Engels did together—*The Holy Family, The German Ideology*—these are not in any sense dogmatic or textbook. They're critiques of the work of his contemporaries. Every major work that Marx ever wrote has "critique" either in its title or subtitle. That's the way he thought that you had to approach problems.

Q: Were you encouraged by anyone at Harvard to study the history of monopoly in the English coal industry, or was that topic of economic history something you came to on your own?

SWEEZY: No, it was something I ran across somewhere in the literature on British economic history, and I decided to concentrate on that. That was when Chamberlain and Robinson were introducing monopolistic and imperfect competition into the neoclassical dis-

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course of the time. It seemed to me from the beginning that there must be something more important about the macro effects of these new ideas about competition than anybody was at that time taking into account. Then the imperfect competition and monopoly competition stuff was totally without integration into the macroeconomic thinking. The one who had more to do than anybody else in the way of making that conjunction of new ideas about competition and the way the economy goes was Kalecki. Kalecki was brilliant; a Marxist, really.

POLITICS OF THE 1930s

Q: What relations, if any, did you have with the Communist Party in Cambridge in the thirties?

SWEEZY: I didn't have any formal relationship. Of course, I knew quite a few of the people who were in the Party, Granville Hicks, particularly. He had a teaching role at Harvard for a while as an open Communist. A large number of the teachers who joined the teacher's union were either in or close to the Communist Party, which was the only really organized movement at the time, much stronger than any other. So I knew quite a few of them and worked with them and had my differences with them.

But I never had any inclination to join them, primarily because of their extreme dogmatism in an intellectual sense. I knew that that was death to your independent thinking. I remember that when I published *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, the CP sat waiting until they got the word from Moscow about whether that was something they would be in favor of, or not. That irritated me to no end. They couldn't make up their own minds.

I was definitely a partisan of Popular Front tactics and Popular Front politics, which, of course, included the Communists, and to a considerable extent there were periods and situations in which they were the dominant factor. But I, like many other left intellectuals, felt that the main problem in the 1930s was fascism, and anti-fascism was a responsibility, and to play any part in it you had to make alliances and coalitions with whoever was on the same side. When the war finally came, of course, the aim was defeat fascism—German, Japanese fascism. Those were not only political experiences, but they had a very deep effect on one's intellectual existence, too. There's nothing quite like it since. Today, the left is fragmented and small, not terribly alive in terms of any intellectual creativity.

Q: The *Monthly Review* group has in common the experience of working for New Deal agencies in the thirties. Harry Magdoff went the highest, to work with the secretary of commerce during the

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Second World War. You, I take it, were doing some sort of contracted work for various agencies, or writing reports for them while you were teaching?

SWEEZY: That was something that was quite usual in the New Deal period, during vacation in the summertime. I spent three summers altogether in Washington. For example, I went to the National Planning Board—later on it became called the National Resources Planning Board—and that's when I did the study on monopoly groups, under Gardiner Means, who was looking around for people. This was happening in several of the New Deal agencies. They were given a lot of freedom to hire outside, to get people in for a few months, or sometimes for longer. All of the good people in the New Deal period, I think, had some kind of connection with the New Deal agencies.

That was when all the younger economists began to get more involved in some kind of political activity. It was partly on the level of the economy and partly on the level of the international situation, the anti-fascist movement, the rise of Hitler and so on. We always thought of the two as being connected, certainly in the Marxist tradition. I was one of a group who put together a study, a little book called *An Economic Program for American Democracy*, by seven Harvard and Tufts economists. It had a big success, was on the bestseller list in Washington for weeks. It was hard to draw the line in those days between the left New Deal and the beginnings of the Marxist movement. I and a few of the others were quite far left already, but we believed in working together, collaborating. We weren't insisting on any formulations that would offend the left New Deal group. But by Washington's standards at the time, it was definitely left-wing Keynesian, going beyond what Keynes himself and many of the official Keynesians, even Alvin Hansen, would have supported.

The department of agriculture was one of the big producers of radicals who didn't proclaim any strong theoretical positions, but were radicals. They were all hoping that the New Deal would go further and develop. That was what was so exciting about Washington in those days. Roosevelt and his people were by no means radicals at all, of course. They were capitalism savers. We were all quite naive, and we didn't realize the narrow limitations of the real New Deal. Yes, I think a lot of the people who later on had an influence in MR, or wrote for MR, some under pseudonyms, had a generally comfortable coexistence with the capitalism savers at that time. [Laughs.]

Q: To me that's interesting, because the politics of *Monthly Review*, especially by the sixties and seventies, became quite revolutionary. Yet it seems that there's still sometimes, well, almost a fondness for the New Deal.

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SWEEZY: Yes. Compared to the real alternative, there was good reason for that. But you're right, there are a lot of inconsistencies in that whole period. They were all straightened out later on, by the other side. [*Laughs.*]

THE WAR YEARS

Q: Some still regard *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, published by Oxford in 1942, as the best introduction to Marxist economic theory. How did you come to write it?

SWEEZY: I became an assistant in the course on economics of socialism in the mid-1930s. I don't remember which year. The professor at the time was Edward Mason, and I was his assistant two or three years. Then when he got tired of the course, he gave it to me. It became my course. In teaching it, I found that there wasn't any suitable reading matter on Marxist economics. I began to develop my own lectures, which over a period of four or five years became the first draft of *The Theory of Capitalist Development.* It was published, I think, in November of 1942. I went in the army a couple of weeks later. I think I had the first volume off the press before I went in the army. I never did do later editions, which perhaps would be a way of keeping it more alive. I don't have an interest in changing anything. In that respect I sort of agree with Schumpeter, who once said that books are like children, and when they leave the home you can't fool with them anymore. They have a life of their own. But still to this day, if a teacher wants to introduce an economics class to Marxian economics he doesn't have much to draw on. So the book probably still is used for that purpose, I expect.

Q: Are you at liberty to say what you did during the Second World War, while working for the OSS?

SWEEZY: Actually, it's not to be taken seriously. [*Laughs.*] The research and analysis branch of the OSS was pretty much a self-governing enterprise. What we did in England, and later on on the continent, was not mandated from Washington. In London, we used to have little seminars on how the war ought to end, but we were supposed to be evaluating intelligence material. We did that, to a certain extent, but I must say the whole intelligence stuff was vastly overrated. It didn't have much to do with anything. The fact that they would want somebody in the OSS who was keeping track of British postwar thinking is because the biggest obstacle, as they still conceived it, to a freer trade world was the British empire.

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You have to remember that at no time—this was my sense of it, anyway—did the United States lose sight of what the war was about from its own point of view. It wanted to come out as the top dog afterwards on a world scale and have a world which was organized according to its interests and its ideologies, a much more free trading world, one where U.S. power would be able to flow out and operate all over the world as far as it was possible. Nazi-Japanese blocs, of course, that's what the war was about—we're going to get rid of them. And when we defeated the Axis Powers, they wouldn't be a problem, but the British empire had to be dismantled. The British at that time were still considered the number two power, the other superpower. Of course, at that time there was not any idea yet of rolling back the Soviet Union because they were allies in the war.

So I was in London for about two years, from the end of 1942 to after the invasion of the continent in 1944. Then I went to Paris in the summer of '44 and was there when V-E day came. Went up to Germany for a while, before being shipped back home in the summer. But during the later part of that, the OSS, what was left of it, was researching Russia. We changed sides. And those of us who didn't want to change sides did what we felt like, and it didn't have much to do with anything, except good ideas.

POSTWAR INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Q: After the war, you decided not to return to Harvard, obtained several grants, and lived in New Hampshire, reading and writing. One book to emerge from that period was *Socialism* in 1949.

SWEEZY: It never did very well. I'm not too pleased with it. I always refused later either to bring it up to date and revise it or to allow it to be reprinted, because there were things I wasn't too happy about, and it would have taken a lot.

Q: What were you unhappy about?

SWEEZY: It took a very simplistic view of the problems of socialism and socialist planning, which later on I just wasn't satisfied with. It was naive, I thought, and too doctrinaire out of a kind of a belief in the possibilities of planning which very much oversimplified problems. It's not a terribly good book, although it isn't a bad book, I don't think.

Q: Do your displeasures with it now reflect a change in position which you've had since then?

SWEEZY: Yes, I think so. From the very beginning, when I first became a Marxist, it was a long process of education and learning to

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get out of the simplistic formulas, without ever actually repudiating them or considering that the positions I had taken, even though oversimplified and overly dogmatic, were wrong. They needed to be refined, to become more aware of the depth and difficulties of the problems. Ideas of revolutionary change—of course, I got this from the literature that I found so compelling in terms of its understanding of historical processes—were vastly oversimplified, vastly underestimating forces of inertia and the dead weight of historical traditions and institutions, the difficulties of changing people to adapt to new situations. All of this was, I would say, pretty largely lacking from my vision of historical process and historical change, and that pretty much informed the framework of the *Socialism* book. It was not a bad statement of positions as I saw them at that time, but these ideas and visions were a way station on the road, I think, to a much more nuanced appreciation of the difficulties of revolutionary processes. That, I would say, has been one of the major themes of my intellectual evolution ever since.

Q: After the war you had to make a decision between academia and not, and you decided not. Did it give you a great deal of freedom that you were able to live and do your work without working for a salary?

SWEEZY: Yes. I've always insisted that it's very hard for an intellectual in this culture, without an independent income or a secure academic job, to be a left intellectual in any meaningful sense. And in many ways now it's becoming more and more difficult without an independent income because the academic world is extremely difficult to break into and get a secure position—well, I don't have to tell you that. Everybody knows that. So the problem of making a profession of being an independent left-wing intellectual requires very special luck.

I had always felt that the people who start off as radicals and had every intention to remain radicals, when subjected to the actual pressures of the real world, find after a while that puts them in a really quite impossible position in many respects. So they follow the lead of where the opportunities take them, and pretty soon they adjust their ideas and their values, political values and preferences, to the real possibilities. If I hadn't had an independent income, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that's the way I would have gone. I can't claim to be any kind of hero. The only reason I blame some people is because they turned around and joined the opposite side and sold their old friends and associates down the river for the good of their careers. That I find despicable, but that they didn't remain left-wing activists, I can't find it in me to really be critical of that. I understand it all too well.

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It's the problem of this culture. It's not totalitarian in the sense that the term is used in political or popular discourse, but it's terribly totalitarian in some deeper sense. You can't survive and be yourself and at the same time make a go of it within this particular culture. The means they have of maintaining control and excluding people who don't tow the mark are subtle, but very effective. Very effective. I haven't seen any really good studies of this kind of thing, although of course you run into bits and pieces of it all the time.

Q: Well, you see it a lot in people.

SWEEZY: Yes.

Q: When you were thinking about founding MR in the postwar period, what were the lessons that you drew from the Progressive Party's experience in 1948?

SWEEZY: We certainly didn't think that the Progressive Party was a viable enterprise, in conclusion. We had hopes for the Progressive Party at the beginning, but it turned out that it wasn't going to go anywhere. I don't think I had any illusions about the Wallace candidacy. I thought it might be a useful educational experience, give people an opportunity to discuss and consider the real problems of the period. There were those who thought that the Progressive Party could be maintained and continued after the election of 1948. I never believed that. I thought it was a one-shot deal, and it turned out in practice to be that.

And it was a very difficult problem, of course, in the interrelations between Wallace and the Communists. Neither Leo nor I had ever been a member or had been even tempted to join the Communist Party. We were perfectly willing to be on the steering committee with Communists, but we had no regular, continuing relations with them at all.

Q: I've never understood, given the history of the Popular Front and the labor movement in the 1930s, the second Popular Front, the New Deal coalition in the 1940s, the depth to which Popular Front ideology seems to have penetrated the mass movements, why it fell apart so quickly between 1945 and 1948.

SWEEZY: I have a theory that the ruling class in this country had been rather shaken by the New Deal. The underlying notion was that after the war we would go back to where we were and that there would be this New Deal tradition or movement, coalition, whatever you want to call it, which would be ready to take up where it left off in the 1930s.

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This was an illusion. But it was real not only among those who were involved but also in the ruling class, which feared the danger of a radical coalition picking up where the New Deal had been broken off by the war. Shortly after the war, there was a kind of conscious planning to disrupt and disintegrate this feared regrouping of the left, with ominous consequences for further down the road. The Cold War, McCarthyism, and the redbaiting were connected to the necessity to split up and fragmentize all those remnants of the 1930s, a very important part of that shameful history of the period from about 1948 to 1956 or 1957, when there began to be some recovery from the trauma of McCarthyism.

FIRST STEPS OF *MONTHLY REVIEW*

Q: The Einstein article in the first issue came through Otto Nathan. How did you meet him? What happened to him?

SWEEZY: Well, it's a complicated story. Otto had been a friend of Leo's for quite a long time, he was a very close friend and helper of Einstein, and he was among the original founders of *Monthly Review.* It's really very hard to explain what happened. He did not want to be among those identified as a founder of *Monthly Review.* You know, it was a very sensitive thing in those days to proclaim you were a socialist. Otto was; he was a German refugee in this country and had been a German Social Democrat for many years. I don't know how he first got to know Einstein or what their relation was in Germany, but over here, he was close to Einstein, and he was the one who arranged with Einstein to write the article. We originally thought of the series of articles as being, "Why I Am a Socialist," but Einstein didn't pick up on that. He said, "Why Socialism?" I don't think there's a great difference, but he preferred that formulation.

Q: Is it Einstein's clearest declaration of his socialism?

SWEEZY: I really don't know. I think it was probably as clear a one as anywhere else. He doesn't say "I'm a socialist" in the piece, but he certainly argues for socialism, and it's a very good piece, still, I think. We've run it hundreds of times—not literally, but many times. [*Laughs.*]

Q: The funding for the magazine came from F. O. Matthiessen.

SWEEZY: Matthiessen, yes. It was the availability of the subsidy from Matthiessen which made it change from idea to reality. That was the only real chunk of money we had until we put out an appeal and the first announcement of the starting. I think there were four

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hundred people on the original list, most of them people that Leo or I knew personally.

Q: Do you remember your initial print run?

SWEEZY: No, I don't. I think it was quite small. Couldn't have been much more than five hundred.

One of *Monthly Review*'s earliest successes was an editorial on the Korean War. It was in the summer of 1950, the invasion from the North. I say invasion from the North, but I think it was actually provoked by Syngman Rhee in the South, then the North fell for the bait. That's my subsequent interpretation. But that was in late June, so we couldn't have had anything out until September. We sent around a proof of this editorial, an analysis of the Korean situation, the origins of the war. We sent it around to a pretty sizable list, maybe ten thousand people. Given the level of comment at the time, I think it was a rather advanced interpretation of the situation—not that we were experts on Korea, but applying the Marxist canon of interpretation to the general situation, plus whatever we could learn from one or two good books that had come out on Korea at the time. That was well-received, probably brought in a relative influx of new subscribers at that time.

CREATING MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS

Q: Speaking of the Korean War, the birth of Monthly Review Press came with publication of I. F. Stone's *Hidden History of the Korean War* in 1952. How well did you know Stone before that?

SWEEZY: Pretty well. We were pretty close to him. Not on a personal basis, but we had known each other in various connections, and he was a supporter of *Monthly Review* from the beginning.

The story is that I was still living in New Hampshire, and I used to go in to New York and would stay with Leo and his wife in their apartment on Barrow Street. I usually spent two or three days there, and we'd get the next issue out and originally we'd write the Review of the Month at that time. One beautiful day, Leo and I decided to get a bit of fresh air, and we decided to have lunch in Central Park. They had a place there where you could get sandwiches, on the west side, I think. We were sitting there enjoying the sunshine, discussing things, when much to our pleasure and surprise, Izzy Stone walked by. He came and sat down, and immediately began to tell us the story of *The Hidden History of the Korean War*, which we didn't know anything about at the time.

It was fascinating. He'd been to England, even, trying to get a publisher, and nobody would touch it. He had gotten absolutely

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nowhere. It was a very sensitive document at the time, and Izzy had been turned down by a large number of publishers. It was the height of McCarthyism, as I recall. We were more and more intrigued by what we heard, and we said to him, "Well, could we have a look at the manuscript?" He said, "Sure," and that he'd send it over to the house. I believe it was about four o'clock in the afternoon that the messenger brought the manuscript to Huby's house. We eagerly grabbed the manuscript and started reading. We read it until all hours of the night and were stunned by it, thought it was a beautiful piece of journalism. We immediately decided that since he hadn't gotten anybody to take it, that we would publish it.

COLLABORATION WITH BARAN AND MAGDOFF

Q: When did you meet Paul Baran?

SWEEZY: I met Paul Baran in 1939. He came over to Harvard, and he had a letter of introduction from Oskar Lange, whom I had gotten to know very well over the years. Oskar was Polish, and Baran had Polish connections to him, and arriving in the United States, he brought the letter. I was working in the library at the time, and I went out of the stacks where I was working, and we hit it off right away. We got along beautifully, and we were in very close agreement on most theoretical questions.

Q: By the time *Monthly Review* was founded and he was out at Stanford, would you say he was a third editor, as it were?

SWEEZY: He never was an editor, but he was very close to us at the beginning. As I said, there were two ways: you could have a secure academic job, or you could have an independent income. He had a secure academic job. He paid a big price for it. A lot of people wouldn't do that in academia. He was always at the bottom of the salary scale. He was always given a lot of extra assignments. They would have liked to force him out because he was an embarrassment to them. They never quite brought themselves to gross violation of academic freedom, although the pressure on the president at the worst part of the McCarthy period was fierce. Baran was a perfect example of one who needed more than just Stanford, because while there were always a few left people at Stanford whom he could communicate with in a more relaxed and creative way, he always felt very isolated there. In many ways he was. He needed the *Monthly Review* environment and institutional help. Well, that was true for all of us around *Monthly Review*, the few of us who were there. You need something more than just an independent means of existence. You need some kind of community, too. *Monthly Review* has provided that for me and for all

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the others—first Leo Huberman, and later on Harry Magdoff and Harry Braverman. *Monthly Review* was the vehicle for maintaining a certain position. It has a kind of a community connected with it. Not that it ever paid anything. We had to be able to support ourselves. Nonetheless, it was an institutional—I don't know quite what to call it.

Q: Before Harry Magdoff came on, he was a longtime friend of the magazine?

SWEEZY: Oh, yes, from the beginning. Leo knew him much better than I did. They were very close. He in general was totally in tune with the magazine. I don't think he and Leo would have had any trouble, if they had been the two editors, in reconciling their differences. To a certain extent it's a matter of agreeing to disagree, and just let it go at that.

Q: Have you and Harry on any occasions had fundamental differences?

SWEEZY: I can't remember a single one. We've had differences over formulations, and I more edit his stuff than he does mine. Sometimes it's just a matter of whether that's a happy way of putting it, or not. I don't think there's ever been a really basic disagreement.

THE MARXISM OF *MONTHLY REVIEW*

Q: What, in your estimation, are the distinctive theoretical contributions to Marxist theory that have been made by *Monthly Review*?

SWEEZY: The *Monthly Review* approach was in the spirit of Marx—revolutionary, non-reformist, non-revisionist—and at the same time non-dogmatic and non-fundamentalist, realizing that Marx didn't say the last word on everything or even on anything. We acknowledged that a hundred years later all kinds of new phenomena have come up and have to be dealt with in the spirit of Marx and not by some kind of exegesis from Marx. That, I would say, is the first and in some ways most important characteristic of this tendency.

There is, in U.S. and international Marxism, the split between those who want to throw out very much that is essential to and valuable in Marxism—like the centrality of class, or labor value theory and its corollaries—and the other, polar opposite tendency, to find everything in *Capital*. It's between the real revisionists who want to throw it all out or change it all around, and those who don't want to change anything. We were very much between those two poles in the sense

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that we wanted to preserve the central methodologies, spirit, and character of Marxism, but not in a fundamentalist and dogmatic way.

Now, that led to the development of various new ideas to cope with the changes which have characterized the last century. Most of them, of course, have roots going way back. I mean, the question of finance and monopoly, all that, you find beginnings with Hilferding in about 1909 or 1910 and, of course, in Lenin. There's nothing totally new about it, but the fundamentalists never really wanted to change anything in the original, didn't want to develop anything that wasn't in these sacred texts of the past, particularly in the Stalin period. Most of the themes, not all but most, are at least adumbrated in *The Theory of Capitalist Development:* not new, but fresh and up-to-date approaches to questions of the business cycle, the long wage stagnation, the whole question of the macroeconomic behavior of capitalism, the accumulation process, and so on. New views towards the accumulation process, which then integrated more and more the monopolistic and financial developments of the big, multinational corporation and so on, beginning around the turn of the century. This is denied completely by the fundamentalists. They claim that there is no real change from the fact that big enterprise has replaced small enterprise since Marx's period, that all of it is in the original, you can find everything there. Competition is in different ways, but just having the same effect. This was not our view and has become increasingly, I think, not standard or predominant among Marxists.

Then the second theme is Baran's breakthrough on the relation between the developed and underdeveloped parts of the capitalist world. The theory that capitalism doesn't spread by creating a homogenized system in the image of the advanced countries that led the way, but rather creates a polarized global system between the developed and the underdeveloped areas, so that the two are dialectically interrelated as parts of a single whole, but not homogenous parts and not ones that are ever going to become homogenous. That leads more or less directly to the interpretation of the historical fact that revolutions since the Second World War took place not in the most advanced capitalist countries, but in the less developed, the underdeveloped capitalist countries. The Russian Revolution was a kind of harbinger of this, but it wasn't quite interpreted in that way. Subsequently, stuff which has been published by Marx in the last few decades has shown that he himself was beginning to think in terms of a dialectical relation between the advanced and the underdeveloped countries.

Then there was Harry Magdoff's emphasis on imperialism, very closely related to Baran's work and the work on monopoly capital and the accumulation process, but putting it into context and applying it to the history of the Second World War and the postwar period. *The Age of Imperialism* is a kind of summing up of a lot of new developments,

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both empirical as well as theoretical developments, putting it together into a coherent whole.

Braverman's contribution consists basically of going back to Marx's ideas, particularly the first volume of *Capital,* on the division of labor and the application of scientific knowledge to the production processes, changes in the labor process, and the degradation of the detailed labor process, the concentration of the skills and knowledge of production in the head office and, as in the case of the scientific management movement, changing workers into more or less parts of a machine process rather than intelligent beings who have to figure out their own ways of handling materials and tools.

There are other parts of the total picture which, I think, we have only begun to deal with successfully, like the new role of finance in the last twenty years. The capital accumulation process tends to stall in the late capitalist formations. Instead of that resulting in a collapse as it did in the 1930s and a deep stagnation which lasted for a whole decade and was only rescued by the war, there's a tendency in the post-Second World War period for this same stalling to generate certain counteractions in the area of finance. What you see now is a new manifestation of the tendency of capital to direct itself not so much toward making useful goods and services as toward manipulating money and speculation, making money directly without the intermediation of a production process.

This has been there all along. It's part of capitalism from the beginning. In fact, as Marx was very careful to point out, the first forms of capital were really merchant capital, money increasing without production but through trade. You buy cheap, transport the goods to an area where the scarcity is more, and you get M expanding into M′, the two poles of the accumulation process, without an intervening production process. Of course, that was superseded in the industrial period beginning in the late eighteenth, throughout the nineteenth century. But now, again, we have entered a phase where the transformation of money into more money increasingly takes place without the intermediation of the production phase, the accompaniments of which are extraordinary growth of debt, the growth of financial markets which are totally unrelated to any real production. It's amazing the extent to which it's already happening, by the day, too. Eventually that will probably create its form of collapse, but it won't be the same kind of collapse as we've had before.

Capitalism always changes. It never really repeats itself. This whole integration of production and finance into an overall theory of the capitalist process is still something which is in its very infancy. It isn't well handled anywhere. There are intimations of it in Keynes. There are intimations in Marx. But the theoretical elaboration, of course, had to depend on history creating a situation where the new theory

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was needed. That's where we are now. Harry and I feel that we're probably too old and not nimble enough intellectually to cope with these problems. All we can do is kind of encourage the younger people to think about them and maybe come up with something. There are a lot of new developments, and there should be a lot of new ideas and new syntheses to go along with them. I wish I were young again. I'd like to be at it.

ON SOCIALISM AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY

Q: How would you define socialism now?

SWEEZY: I define socialism as the opposite or alternative to capitalism. I don't set down any utopian criteria. It is the real Other. I think that is the important thing.

Q: When you began the magazine in 1949, I take it that your definition of socialism was public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy and production according to an economic plan.

SWEEZY: I guess that was true, but I don't think that has to be taken too seriously. I think you have to be pretty much wide open to what it's going to be like. Anybody who tries to tell what it's going to be like is making a big mistake. We know it's not capitalism. That's about all Marx ever said, I think.

Q: In the late 1960s, some of the things I was reading by you indicated that you had decided that earlier definition—public ownership and planning—was inadequate. In part, it's because you believed at that time that public ownership of the heights of the economy alone wouldn't necessarily prevent small commodity production and so forth from blooming into full-fledged capitalism. Essentially, you were trying to come to terms with the problem of the market in post-revolutionary societies. I'm curious whether your thinking has evolved any further on that.

SWEEZY: No, I don't think it's worth expending too much time trying to elaborate it as a core idea. I certainly agree—I think it was Lenin who made this point—that any amount of market economy is a danger, like an infection that will expand. You have to watch the market. You can't absolutely refuse to use it, but if it gets the upper hand then what's happening in Eastern Europe now is inevitable.

Q: The Cuban Revolution was very important to *Monthly Review* early on. When you went down in 1960, you met with both Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. What were your impressions?

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SWEEZY: We were invited down by Latin American friends, colleagues who we'd known and kept in touch with. The position that we took was at that time a very unusual one, which was that the Cuban Revolution was a socialist revolution, and I think that's been borne out. We were totally devoted to it, enthusiastic—naively, I suppose—about this wonderful revolution.

Q: By the time of your second book, *Socialism in Cuba*, in 1969, you were more cautionary, in that you concluded with a discussion of paternalism and bureaucracy as dangers. What are your views on how Cuba has evolved since then?

SWEEZY: They've just been boxed in. We did not, however, view the maturity of the Cuban Revolution as its pollution. We did not have a habit of taking positions that real socialists shouldn't have any right to take. I found the Cuban Revolution one of the most exciting and promising developments at the time, and I've always continued to regard it as such. These are complicated matters, and you can't take any simplistic positions, but I don't think I've ever regretted anything about my position on Cuba.

Q: The Chinese Revolution was also very important to the magazine. Since the 1960s, when you were attracted to the anti-authoritarianism, as you saw it, of the Cultural Revolution, has your thinking changed about structures of participation in post-revolutionary societies?

SWEEZY: No, I don't think so. The whole business of the Cultural Revolution, the lesson or whatever you want to call it, is that you're not going to be able to establish an alternative to capitalism overnight, or in a few years. It's got to be a long, long struggle. There I think Mao was the only one who really tackled the problem, dealt with it. He dealt with it unsuccessfully, but nevertheless the attempt was most important.

Q: For what reasons, do you believe, was the Cultural Revolution unsuccessful?

SWEEZY: It was a struggle between the capitalist roaders and the socialist roaders, and the capitalist roaders won the battle. I don't think there's anything else to it, really. Of course, there were all kinds of problems and many specific struggles which played a role along the way, but I think Bill Hinton's positions come closest to being realistic. I'm not completely sure that he's always right as to details, but his overall way of seeing the situation seems to me by far the best.

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Q: Did you ever travel to China?

SWEEZY: Yes, in 1974, the Magdoffs and my wife and I spent more than a month as guests of an institution for foreign friends in China. We were treated marvelously, and we really had a wonderful time.

Q: Did you meet with Mao?

SWEEZY: We never met with Mao, no. I saw him once, in the Soviet Union in 1957. I was close enough to touch him. There was a big celebration. It was the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution. There were various categories of invitees. One was the unorganized radicals, I guess; I was invited. We were treated very well there, too. I did write something about that after I got back, but nothing as wise as some of the things that I said after coming back from China. [*Laughs.*]

Q: What did you say then?

SWEEZY: Oh, I thought the Soviet Union was on a good course. Later on, we did take a position on the Soviet Union which was much more critical. But in 1957, I think there were still quite a few illusions.

Q: Do you regret any of those positions in the early days of the magazine? The editorial after Stalin died in 1953, for instance, called him one of the greatest men in history, I believe.

SWEEZY: Something like that. Well, in some ways he was, but he had his underside, too. I guess one should have been more cautious, but I think you had to take positions which were pretty much unambiguous. Either you were for or against the regimes, the actually existing socialist countries. I should have been, of course, much more perceptive, selective, and better informed. No doubt about that. I'm sure I wouldn't write anything the same now as I would have at any given time in the past. I wouldn't want to go back and try to rewrite those articles.

Q: Did you ever respond to Irving Howe's famous article "New Styles in Leftism" in *Dissent*, where he referred to you as a leading authoritarian leftist?

SWEEZY: No, but I did one time appear on a program someplace with Irving Howe. What I remember is Howe taking the position that I was the most dangerous of all, because I knew what was going on, and still kept supporting these horrors. See, the rest of the left were just dupes, who believed the nonsense.

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Pretty early on, there was a position like the Webbs's—that the Soviet Union was an ideal new society. Gradually one had to get over that. But not by turning around, becoming an enemy, joining the other side. That's always a difficult line to follow, I think, but it's absolutely essential.

Q: And in some way it involved defense of those states?

SWEEZY: Yes, yes, indeed.

Q: There were two camps, and you couldn't position yourself outside of those camps?

SWEEZY: Well, I don't know what I would have done if I'd been in the other camp. I probably would have been eliminated. I don't know how you suit the possibilities with what you think. I guess I'm lucky to have always been over here where you had at least some protection for freedom of speech. But we in this country were only luckier and were only grateful for the luckiness if we used it. But those are all very difficult questions to take positions on. I recognize that there was a very large number of people around the world, with whom I generally agreed, who believed that it was absolutely essential to support the revolutions where they had taken place.

Q: Then again, by the sixties, your criticisms of the Soviet Union were quite penetrating, of a very fundamental nature, calling it a new class society.

SWEEZY: Yes, to my way of thinking, the problem of the revolutions of the twentieth century is that they did not bring to power the proletariat organized as a class. What they did bring to power is tightly organized revolutionary parties drawn from elements of various sections of society. Those parties expropriated the traditional bourgeoisie but did not do away with the capital-labor relation as such. They substituted the state for the private capitalists as the employer of labor, unifying the many capitals which had grown up independent of each other in the course of capitalist history. That is not to say that all units of capital were put under one management, of course—only that all the separate managements became subject to the same ultimate authority, which now assumed the life-and-death powers that had previously been exercised by the impersonal forces of the market.

The question then arose of what we should call these states. They weren't socialist, but were they capitalist? Charles Bettelheim and I had an exchange on this point, among others, that lasted a period of some years. Bettelheim thought that we should call the Soviet Union

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a capitalist society, but I thought that would introduce into our analysis preconceptions, expectations, and biases which would inevitably influence our findings and cause much confusion. To my way of thinking, the power, prestige, and privileges of the Soviet rulers did not derive from the ownership of private wealth but from unmediated control over the state apparatus and hence over total social capital. The Soviet Union, though a class society and not the socialist society it claimed to be, had none of the economic laws of motion comparable to those of capitalism. For example, there was nothing like the chronic unemployment typical of the West.

To me, the precise terminology made no great practical difference, so I called the Soviet Union, rather indeterminately, a post-revolutionary society. I held that most of the distortions in post-revolutionary societies could be traced to the conditions of capitalist hostility, that the behavior and ideology of the Soviet ruling class was the result of its long struggle against an economically and militarily more powerful enemy.

PROSPECTS FOR MARXISM

Q: What do you think are the biggest problems Marxist theory now confronts?

SWEEZY: My objection to the present-day Marxist intellectual movement in the United States is its academicism, you might say. It exists mostly in the academic world, and it has a lot of the weaknesses of the academic world: divisions into fields, kinds of specializations. In some ways the Marxist is supposed to do the same kind of things as the ordinary academic scholars, but with a Marxist slant. So they get caught, trapped into doing pretty much Marxist versions of the academic specializations and fashions. Like Marxist economists have a tendency to become mathematical economists because the bourgeois economists are mathematical, that kind of thing, rather than having a much more radical reinterpretation of the American historical experience, which is not terribly advanced, I don't think, even yet.

Q: Paul, do you think you're closer to socialism now than it seemed when you started *Monthly Review*, or farther?

SWEEZY: Well, if socialism is ever going to happen, we're nearer to it now than we were then. [*Laughs.*]

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AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRY MAGDOFF

The twentieth anniversary issue of *Monthly Review* in May 1969 carried the announcement that Harry Magdoff—the independent economist—had officially joined Paul Sweezy as co-editor, replacing Leo Huberman, who had died in 1968.

Born in 1913 in the Bronx, son of a house painter, Magdoff attended the City College of New York where he became a member of the Social Problems Club and editor of *Frontiers*, the club's monthly periodical. In 1932, he traveled to Chicago to attend the founding conventions of the National Students League and the Youth League Against War and Fascism. On that trip, he married fellow New York student Beatrice Greizer (familiarly known as Beadie, to whom he has been married ever since). He was editor of the NSL's national publication *Student Review* in 1932-1933. After being expelled from City College for his activism, he attended New York University, receiving a B.S. in economics in 1936. He accepted a position in Philadelphia with the Works Progress Administration's national research project, for which he conducted studies of the labor force, unemployment, industrial capacity, and productivity. In 1940, he moved to Washington, D.C., to take charge of the civilian requirements division of the National Defense Advisory Commission. After U.S. entry into the Second World War in 1941, he served with the War Production Board. Near the end of the war, he was the chief economist in charge of the Current Business Analysis Division at the Department of Commerce, where he oversaw the *Survey of Current Business*. He spent his final years in government as special assistant to Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace. In 1948, he was summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Unemployed, he returned to New York, where he took various jobs, sometimes anonymously, in financial analysis and insurance before joining the staff of Russell & Russell, a publisher of scholarly out-of-print books, between 1959 and 1965. Magdoff returned to the fore as a public Marxist intellectual with "Problems of United States Capitalism," an essay in *The Socialist Register 1965*, edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville (London: Merlin Press). Widely recognized for his economic analysis of impe-

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rialism, Magdoff is author of *The Age of Imperialism* (1969) and *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (1977), and co-author with Paul Sweezy of *The Dynamics of U.S. Capitalism* (1970), *The End of Prosperity* (1977), *The Deepening Crisis of U.S. Capitalism* (1980), *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (1987), and *The Irreversible Crisis* (1988), all from Monthly Review Press.

The following interview was conducted by Christopher Phelps in New York City on September 20, 1998.

YOUTHFUL RADICALISM

Q: I thought I'd begin, Harry, by being a little unfair to you and reading from an old piece of yours.

MAGDOFF: That's a terrible thing to do!

Q: See if you can guess when this was written: "Very often, particularly in the classroom, imperialism is defined as the policy of a government aimed at conquering or controlling foreign territories. . . . In its attempt to be all-inclusive, to take in all attempts at foreign conquest, this definition excludes the key to the understanding of each. It covers everything but explains nothing. There is a difference between the colonial annexation by highly developed monopoly capitalism searching for markets and raw materials, and the colonial projects of slaveholding Rome."

MAGDOFF: That's from *The Age of Imperialism,* isn't it?

Q: That's from the *Student Review* in 1932.

MAGDOFF: No!

Q: Absolutely. Sounds like *Monthly Review,* doesn't it?

MAGDOFF: I just can't believe it. I thought it was from the book.

Q: So the germs of your thought were present way back then. How did you become a radical? I take it your parents were not, particularly.

MAGDOFF: No, they weren't, but I lived in an environment where radicalism was not strange. When the Russian Revolution took place—the first revolution, the Kerensky revolution—the family had relatives on the Lower East Side whom we were visiting, half-sisters of my father. We went by elevated train. The train was a madhouse. There were people with bottles of whiskey, drinking and singing. It was all, "Down with the tsar!" Normally, how would an American boy, age five

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or so, have any consciousness about the tsar and the fact that this was something to celebrate?

Secondly, the First World War. My uncle was called, and to my mother it was like her son, almost. After the draftees got their papers, they were supposed to come together for reporting. It was in a schoolyard, and I was with him. I saw women crying—sweethearts, mothers. In one case I heard of a mother who couldn't come, because she couldn't take it.

So the idea of war and revolution was all part of my experience in the immigrant community.

Q: Then, at City College, you became more of a conscious and organized radical?

MAGDOFF: No, I was already radical. I had read a lot of Marx by the time I got to City College: the *Critique of Political Economy*, the *Manifesto*, and a great deal more.

The popular notion about students in the twenties was that they drank the hard stuff to excess and wore raccoon coats. By accident, I landed in the high school English class from which the editors of the following year's school newspaper were to be chosen. Among our assignments was to write an editorial. I wrote one contrasting student riots over social issues in Hungary—maybe Romania, I can't recall—with the indifference of U.S. college students to poverty and politics. The teacher and I got along well. He had read Veblen and asked me to talk about Veblen to the class. But at the end of the term, when the editorial staff of the next term was announced, the class expressed surprise that I wasn't listed for any position. The teacher apologized: "Can you imagine the editorials Harry would write?"

I think the determining element in my radicalization was the demonstration of the unemployed in Union Square in March 1930. The fact that I went there shows an inclination, an interest. The experience, however, was overwhelming. The square was mobbed, crowded with gaunt-faced people, dressed as you might expect people in poverty to dress. They listened quietly to the speeches, applauding and shouting from time to time. Then a speaker roused the crowd to a high pitch and urged that all march down to City Hall. As the crowd began to move, mounted police appeared. With billy clubs, they beat anyone within reach ruthlessly on heads, arms, shoulders. Blood splattered. I ran like hell.

Q: What were the circumstances of your expulsion from City College?

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MAGDOFF: Well, in the early thirties, the change among students was startling and sudden, not a revolution but a transformation, a rapid growth of student political activity. That was where my politics grew. As I remember, those of us in the Social Problems Club at City College decided to put out a magazine called *Frontiers,* and I became editor. My first article was about the dangers of fascism, when the Nazis got their first big vote in the election. We sold it for a nickel. It got to be very popular on campus, and we sold large numbers. We just barely covered our costs. Not like *Monthly Review!* You know, we'd take it one place and they'd do something for us, and we'd carry the type someplace a little cheaper—that sort of thing. It was also the Depression years. People cut prices. I don't remember the details, all I know is that we didn't have the deficits that I've known later in my life!

Q: Ah, the carefree days of youth.

MAGDOFF: That's right. What happened was, you were supposed to get approval to have a publication, we didn't, and they suspended the club. We checked, and we found that the Democratic Party club had a paper, and they never got the formal approval of it. We complained, but that did nothing. So a group of us got together, I think at my house, and we wrote a leaflet telling what had happened and protesting it. I headed the leaflet, "Stop Whistling in the Dark." I used the idiomatic expression incorrectly, but it was appropriate for getting people's attention! We distributed it at the subway and at the school. That was a violation, and we were then suspended.

We could only gather again, after a period, with a faculty advisor. None of the teachers we approached wanted to be faculty advisor, partly because it was a nuisance, but more likely because they did not want to displease the bureaucratic college administration. Finally, somebody in our gang said, "Why don't we ask Morris Cohen?" Morris Raphael Cohen, the philosopher, was God to most of us. Some of our group went to him and he said yes, on one condition: that the meetings be held in his presence at his room during his lunch period. This room had many glass bookcases filled with medieval documents, it seemed to me. His desk was on a small platform. He sat and ate his sandwiches while we had our meetings. His sandwich came in a brown bag with grease spots, just like my mother's, the same kind of sandwich: an omelette or something like that in a roll. He would slowly chew on a Mallomars cookie. I can still visualize it. We stood, we talked, we discussed affairs of the world—and he'd never open his mouth. He sat as if he was listening to what we were saying. He never read but seemed to pay strict attention to momentous debate, which he probably disagreed with. It was an impressive experience, and of course consistent with his firm belief in the freedom of speech.

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Now, I don't remember all the events that led to our expulsion. At some point the administration did something we thought so unjust and arbitrary that we wanted to rouse public attention and, of course, public support. We rented a big hall and conducted a trial of the City College president, Robinson, and other college officials. We named our own judges—I was one of them—and our prosecuting attorney, and invited the school to have equal time for reply. They didn't come, of course. We had a wonderful, packed meeting. Got lots of publicity. Shortly thereafter, a number of the activists were asked to come to a meeting of the board of trustees, who asked a lot of questions about the trial and then expelled us.

Q: I see. And then you went to NYU?

MAGDOFF: I wasn't going to go any place, but my mother was very unhappy. She had never been to school, taught herself to read, was highly intelligent, and had an inordinate respect for education. Over the years, she had squirreled away some housekeeping money, enough to pay for a semester at NYU.

NEW DEAL DAYS

Q: In the late 1930s and early 1940s, you held a number of positions in various agencies in Philadelphia and Washington, eventually rising to serve as assistant to the secretary of commerce. Did you feel at all ambivalent, as a Marxist, about working for the government?

MAGDOFF: No. You have to understand, in the thirties, getting a job was a great achievement. The lines were long for taking civil service jobs—as post office workers, statistical clerks, et cetera. If a Marxist got a job with a government agency, he was a lucky stiff. He was the one who paid for the coffee. When I got a job with the National Research Project, it meant a decent wage and, mirabile dictu, a challenging problem to solve. You sat in an office supplied with research materials and were paid every week to sit and think about why there was so much unemployment. Who needed heaven?

Not all the jobs in the government were the same, of course. It was a capitalist, imperialist government. Being part of a police force that broke up picket lines or stood by the roadside watching a Negro being lynched, or being a marine who helped keep "order" in Nicaragua—these, too, were government jobs. But there were jobs in government during the New Deal where one could be actively engaged in getting a better distribution of welfare, aid in getting electricity to rural areas, help restore the soil, and fight for decent social security and unemployment insurance. All this, besides the many who were fortunate to get clerical jobs to feed their families.

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Q: Tell me about the kinds of things you worked on in the New Deal years.

MAGDOFF: Well, my first job was to design and construct measures of labor productivity. This was in 1936, when the government had been spending large sums on public works, outright relief, and WPA jobs. Washington expected that in addition to the direct good this spending would do to help people, it would serve to prime the pump, to get the economic system back into shape. But the priming wasn't doing much good. Unemployment remained high. Could the culprit be technology, that fewer people were needed to keep production high? Hence the need to study technological changes and productivity. Over the years, economists had constructed different formulas that might be used to measure productivity change in the leading manufacturing industries. Too often they were more interested in the mathematics than the subject. I adopted a different approach, focusing on the purpose of the measurement, so that mathematics became a subordinate tool. The purpose at the time was to measure employment opportunities under different conditions of volume and composition of production. From this, it followed that different products were to be compared according to the amount of labor time taken to produce them. This was a novelty, a marked departure from the usual approach of comparing products according to the value added. How else would conventional economists think in a market system where money is the measure of everything? Yet here we wanted to study the question from the point of view of labor, which meant that different products would be measured by the man-hours of labor required, and not by profits, advertising, cost of machinery, et cetera.

Needless to say, the labor theory of value is another matter. What interested me on this occasion was that contrary to the standard practice of the economics profession, labor time can be a logical and useful measure. When I wrote this up in an article for the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* in 1939, I concluded by pointing out that if the purpose of studying productivity was not unemployment but to ascertain how much a given labor force could produce to meet the needs of the people, then the design of the productivity index would be very different. I was so pleased with myself to have introduced a socialist idea in a stodgy, technical journal! I doubt that more than five or six readers recognized what I was getting at.

I never got the chance to test productivity measures in a socialist-directed society, but I did get involved in central planning regarding machinery for metalworking plants, a critical bottleneck in military production shortly after the United States entered the Second World War. To the extent that there was a half-assed attempt at planning, it

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was concerned with supposed equity between different branches of the military. But this bureaucratic approach prevented the airplane factories from getting rolling, because even though they had plenty of Type A machine tools they lacked Type B. On the other hand, there were tank factories with a reverse imbalance. As a result of some work I had done on metalworking machinery factories, I was called in to try to find a way to coordinate the supplies and production. To get the program underway, I felt that consensus rather than force of law was the way to go. Interestingly enough, the manufacturers, the clerical workers, who had to supply information fast, and the War Production Board officials created few obstacles once they understood our aims. The only serious friction came from representatives of the military services. I remember to this day the fairly high-ranking naval officer who couldn't understand the need for coordinated planning and bitterly complained, "But doesn't water seek its own level?" This is not too different from the cries we hear half a century later from so-called market socialists, with their varying degrees of faith in the efficiency and equity of a market allocation of resources.

WHEN COLD WINDS BLEW

Q: Given all that you've said, the postwar period, especially 1948 onward, must have been devastating.

MAGDOFF: It was very hard for us. We had nothing—no reserves—and two children. Beadie got a job teaching, part-time at first, then full-time. They badly needed teachers of the retarded. I had work, but always a little of this, a little of that. Nothing certain, nothing sure. Finally, I got a job for $75 a week and came home with a box of candy. It was a big deal.

The job was the craziest kind of thing: sales promotion manager for a television company that produced programs. I asked the boss, "How come?" He knew about my being hounded politically. He said, "I could get you cheap." Then, when I went on Wall Street, I told the boss that there had been a lead story on the *New York Times* front page about me at one point, and he might be visited by the FBI. He said, "I don't care, as long as you can make money for me."

I hated Wall Street. I just *hated* it.

Q: Why doesn't that surprise me?

MAGDOFF: Finally, I had to solve an insurance problem for somebody, and I was able to solve it. The insurance people were impressed, so they asked me to come to work for them as an insurance broker. Well, that at least was a more honorable job to me. People needed insurance. I didn't care for it, but at least I was doing something useful.

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We managed, and we also had an interesting life. We met new and interesting people—Leo Huberman, Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, Stanley Moore, Hube Wilson, Carl Marzani, Annette Rubinstein—with whom we became the best of friends. There were also, meanwhile, grand juries and lawyers, and a lot of tension involved. Newspaper stories. The kids were involved. Beadie was called down to the Board of Education. We didn't have what some of the radicals had: the backing of an organization. Going to the committees and the juries alone is a very tough thing, and people who had a party affiliation of some sort had a support group. We had friends, and also the family, who didn't necessarily agree but were supportive.

Our fortunes changed with Russell & Russell. The company was facing severe financial constraints, and the owner came to me for advice, and I said, "You need money." I put a little money in which came from my work on Wall Street. That's what made me independent. As soon as I could, I quit. Atheneum bought us up. So in about eight years, we went from poverty to a modest level of independence. And I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't have been for the goddamned committees.

Q: Were you reading *Monthly Review* from the beginning?

MAGDOFF: Oh, from the very first issue. I found it on a newsstand on 42nd Street near the library. I couldn't afford a subscription, but every month I would go to 42nd Street. The proprietor had very thick glasses, and on his stand was everything from all over the world, and everything political. You'd meet CPers, Trotskyists, anarchists, Zionists, and plenty of nice eccentrics. There were always people around that you could talk with. That's where I'd get my *Monthly Review.* I fell in love with it for three reasons: it talked about socialism, a taboo topic at the time; it declared itself independent, beyond the control of any party; and the language was clear and simple. These things gave it a quality that was altogether different.

IMPERIALISM AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Q: One of the distinguishing characteristics of the magazine, and your work in particular, has been the economic analysis of imperialism. How would you say that the position of you and others in the MR group—Baran, Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and so forth—on imperialism and underdevelopment differed if at all substantially from the socialist analysis of imperialism earlier in the century?

MAGDOFF: It would be hard for me to answer that. The distinguishing thing, it seems to me, in terms of imperialism was that our position was without a sort of arrogance of the left. Among Marxists, party

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people, and so on—and I don't just mean CP but Trotskyists and so on—there was always a feeling that "we know best," you see. The position of MR was a closer identity psychologically, a way of thinking, with the third world. I don't know whether it was a question of anybody influencing anybody else, but we came together a lot because we thought the same way. It's not that we were better, but that it was high up on our thinking and our agenda, to this day.

Q: How do you think the particular propositions of the MR school stand up? In particular, I'm wondering about the argument that development in the third world was systematically stymied.

MAGDOFF: Industrial development? You are justified in raising that point, but I don't think that was what was most important about the MR position. If anything, the most important part was that development in the periphery was, as Gunder Frank put it, the development of underdevelopment.

Our thesis was that it was in the interest of the first world, of the capitalist centers, to have the colonies or semi-colonial areas as preserves to make profit. If profit could be made by putting a factory there, you did it that way. If profit was to be made by controlling agriculture, you did it that way. You then got in the third world a comprador group who benefitted from their connection to the first world, and who kept development from taking place, especially in agriculture. You did not have an independent bourgeois class that was ready to make a revolution or do whatever was necessary to become the ascendant class in society. The ruling class was usually a combination of different elite groups. The landlords played a very important role, as did the comprador capitalists. So the class composition of these countries worked against development.

In my articles later issued as *The Age of Imperialism*, I showed how aid and debt creation created persistent balance of payments problems and debt peonage. These, together with currency devaluation, which *The Age of Imperialism* also explained, are strategic factors in the current economic crisis in Asia. I am not claiming the mantle of prophecy for MR, rather, proper recognition of MR's record of understanding the lasting bonds of the third world, even the most successful countries; the quarter century of stagnation in the advanced capitalist world; and the international financial explosion.

ENGAGING WITH THE THIRD WORLD

Q: People use the phrase "third worldism" to describe the politics of MR. One thing that is sometimes said on the left about the magazine is that it neglected class struggles within the imperialist centers—within the United States, for example—in the misplaced

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belief that struggles in the periphery were going to eventually solve the revolutionary problem. Actually, in rereading the magazine, I don't think that criticism of the magazine stands up, with a few exceptions. There has always been attention to labor and internal struggles within the advanced capitalist countries.

MAGDOFF: There's always been. The accusation of "third worldism" comes, I think, from two sources. One is that much more attention was paid to third world situations and third world struggles by MR than by any other publication on the left. In other words, you found out more. There was more space devoted to it. The other is that to us this is where the struggles were taking place. It wasn't the fact that we knew what the next step in history was going to be, or that we expected, as some believed, that the periphery would surround the centers of capitalism. It's just that this was important, and this is where the struggle actually was.

We did have articles on labor whenever there was something that we felt was worth publishing. But within the left there were those who felt that this was third worldism, and they accused us of saying that everything was in the third world. We felt that we were reporting what was happening, what we thought was important. The fact is that there *was* a Cuba, there *were* things happening in China that were very different, and, of course, there *was* the Indo-Chinese war, and so on. I think this is also a distinguishing feature of *Monthly Review*—it had to be. Our aim was to deal with reality. We didn't speculate about the future. We had our hopes, but we weren't about to forecast the future. Our task was, and remains, the analysis of the real world.

Q: How do you now think about the range of armed struggles in the third world for which the magazine had enthusiasm? Some now say that the left rather uncritically invested hope in a whole series of such movements, hope that turned out to be unwarranted. Things certainly haven't panned out in quite the way that the magazine wished.

MAGDOFF: I don't think that it is up to the left to judge whether it is warranted or unwarranted when people are in struggle where there is tremendous poverty, misery, and little hope, and in the process either make mistakes, or don't make the best decisions, or are misled by opportunists. It is a natural phenomenon, to be expected. History does not come easy.

What we are talking about is a process of liberation which involves not merely a mechanical formula. It involves a way of life, a way of thinking, and there's a great deal of suffering in the process, problems that cannot be solved. It's very complex, and you're going to get these kinds of problems. It's our job to study and to see and to understand

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what the forces were. But to judge? It's wrong. Marx at one point says that there will be many revolutions and wars and defeats before the working class learns how to be a ruling class. And that's it. History takes a hell of a lot more work, comes with many more setbacks, than we expect.

Q: What's also meant by "third worldism"—and this I think you'll agree is true—is that there was a Maoist component to the editors' thinking.

MAGDOFF: Oh, there was a Maoist component. There's no question about it. There were things that Mao said that we felt were major contributions to Marxist theory and to understanding of the problems of the third world, to this day.

Q: Yet at the same time you opened the pages of the magazine to people who weren't Maoist at all. For example, Trotskyists or people who came out of Trotskyist backgrounds: Isaac Deutscher, Ernest Mandel, Adolfo Gilly, Hal Draper, Grace and James Boggs, and, more recently, Michael Löwy and Alan Wald. Nowhere else on the Maoist left would you find that, and rarely on the Trotskyist left.

MAGDOFF: No. I got a letter from a member of the Maoist party in Norway. "My friends," he said, and I'm sure he includes himself in that, "agree that there's a lot of good stuff in *Monthly Review.* But it's also a bit reformist." We don't go with Mao all the way. [*Laughs.*]

I think the point that you're making is a very important one, and it needs to be recognized. One of the things that attracted me to *Monthly Review* from the beginning was its non-sectarian character. I think sectarianism was inbred in the history of socialism in the United States and elsewhere, and it was very harmful. Now, that doesn't mean that you just accept every idea and everything goes. But you don't have a strict line and say, "You don't cross my line, or you're wrong." That's what appealed to me very strongly in *Monthly Review.*

Isaac Deutscher to us was a very important intellectual, a great man. I didn't agree with him on a number of things, but he was someone you had to listen to and respect. Mandel, also. One of the nicest things Mandel ever said to me was when I was complaining, "Let's not kid ourselves. Our circulation is very small." "Harry," he says, "*Die Neue Zeit* had only thirteen thousand readers!" Well, of course, Germany was much smaller than the United States! But the fact that he would put it in those terms impressed me very much.

REFLECTIONS ON MAOISM

Q: What do you draw upon in Mao still?

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MAGDOFF: To me, the important thing is a different view of development and socialism, one that puts a very strong emphasis on consciousness as a factor in overcoming the competitive spirit, which is not something that will happen overnight. It might even take centuries, but you have to work towards it. You have to think and be conscious of it.

Also the fact that there's always the tendency toward the formation of strata and classes, if not in Marx's sense of classes, at least group interests different from the masses' interests. You have to fight against that, have constant revolution, be conscious of it and struggle, not accept it as the firm established state, the one perfect way of doing things.

Then the strong emphasis on the peasantry, and the role of industry associated with the peasantry: "walking on two legs" as a principle.

There is also his critique of the notion that the development of the productive forces is the most important thing—that element of Soviet development, whether it came from theory, self-interest, or both. Of course, you've got to develop the productive forces. You go to China, and you see someone sitting on a roadside chiseling on a piece of stone with a hand chisel, and you think how many hours and days he's got to do it, when it could be done so easily. The productive forces are important to lighten the work and to get more product out of it for the people. But if you emphasize them to the exclusion of productive relations, then you go away from socialism. Privileges start to develop.

These, to me, are very important elements of Maoism. Now, you can find things in Mao, start looking again, analyze his every word, and so on—but *these* ideas are strictly important.

Q: I take it, then, that you disagree with the criticisms of the Cultural Revolution prevalent today?

MAGDOFF: The attempt in China to move the high school students and college students to the country sounds arbitrary. And it's true, it is. There's no other way of doing these things. The point is the city people looked down on the farm people, didn't understand what hard work was like and what their life was like. On the other hand, farm people needed that education. In many cases, there's no question that students were misused. There were all sorts of problems. But there were other areas: they instituted a speaker system and they learned about work.

Nothing that you do on a mass scale is not going to have complications and contradictions. When terrible things happened, it was the result of doing things before there was preparation and program. You have to have the institutions for it. It doesn't come by itself.

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Now, I'm not defending everything that happened. I'm not saying that disasters did not occur for one reason or another. But the approach, the thinking, the ideas are fundamental socialist ideals that apply to the third world and should be applied to the first world, too, which has not been uppermost in the thinking of the Communist Parties. In that sense, Mao's words are not a Bible, but the ideas are fundamentally important. His criticism of the Soviet book on economics was very important.

Now, you say "politics are in command," and then you get people who are members of the Communist Party but are no good, and so you get *their* politics in command. It's not a question of the Communist Party, but of the particular individuals that are involved, the particular clique that happens to develop. That's all part of it, part of the complexities of a developing society. But the idea of putting politics in command, that it's not productive forces but productive relations, is democracy—not in the classic sense, but democracy. One of the big things in the Cultural Revolution was that people began to talk. They got to speak up against their leaders. It was a new thing altogether. It failed, for all sorts of reasons. But the idea that you can speak up is very important.

Q: I see that anti-authoritarianism of the Cultural Revolution as being very contradictory, because at the same time there was a tremendous cult of personality around Mao and a great amount of arbitrary authority in his hands.

MAGDOFF: There's no question that it held them up. I'm not justifying it, because I really don't know what happened. Some of the Maoists have explanations of that: that it was not Mao's doing, and so on. I don't know whether that's so or not. In the turmoil, a revolution was produced. In the revolution, a lot of evil came out, and various forces that had been repressed came into conflict with one another, came out into the open. And it didn't work. There wasn't a preparation for it. But at the same time, there was a challenge, a challenge to the intellectuals. There were intellectuals who were tortured, and some of them were badly treated. Some of it was very stupid, very terrible. It's a big country with a lot of people in it, so many things happened at the same time. But something fundamental happened, and I think that the attitude of peasants and intellectuals differed toward the Cultural Revolution.

So it's not a question of taking a position for or against. I wouldn't even think in those terms. I think it needs examination, study, to be seen from different angles. And the positive things in it, I think, are very strong. Democratic ideas were introduced, even though authoritarianism was in control. The idea that you can challenge

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the leaders and question what they say, even though democracy was suppressed, opened things up for a period.

BLACK LIBERATION AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Q: I want to ask you about two features of the sixties radicalization, black liberation and women's liberation. It's interesting to me that in both cases, the issue is important to the magazine, yet it's sometimes hard to chart precisely the magazine's position. For instance, starting with Oliver Cox, then James Boggs, and more recently writers like Cornel West and Manning Marable, the magazine has always had relationships with Marxist black intellectuals.

MAGDOFF: Not enough, in my opinion.

Q: That seems true, too. Still, *relationships*, which I think both parties have found valuable. How would you summarize the nature of the magazine's thinking on the question of black liberation? One of the big divides in black thought has been between nationalism and integrationism—at least that was how it was framed in the fifties and sixties. Yet the magazine's position seems to transcend that. There's support for revolutionary nationalism in some respects, but an openness to black and white working hand-in-hand together.

MAGDOFF: That's a good point that you make.

Q: Let me read from a Review of the Month, "The Old Left and the New," published in the same issue that announced you as editor, May 1969: "What a distance we've come in a few short years! In place of the reformist old left which dreamt of uniting whites and blacks under a single leadership and achieving its aims through pressure politics, we now have a new left which understands and accepts (1) the necessity of revolution and (2) that at least for the foreseeable future whites and blacks must organize separately while struggling together."

MAGDOFF: I think that passage, written by Paul, is important. That's the difference between *Monthly Review* and party publications, and the way party publications operate: "There's only one correct way, and we know it." What's reflected there is what happened in the struggle itself.

SNCC itself started out as black and white together. The black activists found, in terms of their own experience, that they had to have their own organization. Paul and I in our practical experience, in our activities, took the same position. The responsibility of whites is to support the black struggle, not to lead it. Moreover, to respect the

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wishes of African Americans on how they wish to organize. Who knows what forms the struggle will take in the future? But we do know from the past how swiftly whites tend to dominate, for all sorts of reasons, because of the long history of hierarchy, educational differences, organizational experience, and a deeply ingrained sense of being second-class citizens. I think what happened in the striving for self-direction came from experience in the struggle, not from a preconceived theoretical position.

I don't remember whether it was covered in "The Old Left and the New," but to me even cultural challenges were important in the sixties. It didn't come from us, but they raised questions about bourgeois culture that were never raised by the left in the past, as such. I don't mean that at some point in Greenwich Village around the First World War they weren't raised, but they were raised by a certain kind of people, not people who were in the struggle. For all the criticisms of the new left, the new left had something to say which was very important.

Q: Now, what about socialist-feminism? I'm curious if you remember how you got that Margaret Benston article, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," published in September 1969.

MAGDOFF: Oh, I got it. I was up in Canada, at Simon Fraser University. Margaret Benston was wonderful. She was a chemist and had a marvelous point of view. I said, "Write it up," and she sent it. She was part of a circle in which Kathleen Gough was very important.

Q: Gough wrote frequently for the magazine in the seventies.

MAGDOFF: She was a fighter and a good anti-imperialist. She wrote a very good article on colonialism, imperialism, and anthropology which we published in MR. I asked her to come to one of our anniversaries, and she gave a wonderful speech.

Q: The Benston article had an extremely wide influence at the time.

MAGDOFF: It had a big influence, yes, though strangely we were very criticized by people who thought that we didn't write enough about the women's question. My argument was, "Get us the articles that would be useful for us." We didn't see ourselves as getting involved in the detailed criticisms between the various feminists, on levels we didn't understand. We felt that a lot of it became infighting among intellectuals, with nothing of substance. But we were ready to, and did, publish pieces. Not enough, but we welcomed it.

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CAPITALISM AND STAGNATION

Q: A hallmark of MR's economic thought has been the theory that "stagnation is the normal and natural condition of monopoly capitalism," as you and Paul wrote in "The Economic Crisis in Historical Perspective" in April 1975. The MR school seems distinguished from other theorists of stagnation, like Alvin Hansen, by its emphasis on monopoly as the causal factor. Why is monopoly the cause of stagnation? And how can the theory account for increasing competitive pressures since the 1960s from Asia and Europe?

MAGDOFF: While I share the view that stagnation is the normal and natural condition of monopoly capitalism, MR has no "party line" on this issue. Speaking for myself, for example, I do not believe that the specter of stagnation was absent in earlier stages of capitalism. It should go without saying that an inner dynamism is an outstanding feature of capitalism, and that its growth is spurred by new products and technological advances. In time, however, the stimulus provided by each innovation peters out. New incentives are needed. But there is no certainty that enough innovations will come along for new or expanded enterprises to provide jobs for the growing labor force and for workers displaced by speed-up or new technology. Without the stimulation of innovation, capital investment, profits, and the economy as a whole slow down—stagnation. It's the threat of that eventuality that leads the ruling class to seek special development factors to support capital accumulation, new markets and new areas in which to invest, for example. An outstanding factor which counteracted stagnation tendencies from the earliest days of capitalism was the conquest and penetration of non-capitalist territories.

Why, then, the argument that stagnation is the normal and natural condition of the *monopoly* stage of capitalism? To follow the reasoning on this point, it is important to see that much more is involved than the behavior of individual corporations. Monopoly capital is closely associated with a number of historic changes during the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is an integral element of what might be described as a climacteric in the maturation of industrially advanced capitalism.

The 1870s and 1880s witnessed a universal lengthy stagnation. This was also the time when younger industrial powers reached the point where they could challenge Britain's hegemony. Accession of colonies accelerated. Three times as much territory was acquired by the industrial powers from 1870 to the First World War as in the previous seventy-five years. The key attributes of the new imperialism became clear in the last part of the nineteenth century: strife among the powers for colonial acquisition, intensified competi-

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tion in each other's markets, and the emergence of financial markets challenging Britain's dominance.

Along with this sea change in capitalism, as both cause and effect, came a major leap in the concentration of capital. The giant corporations which emerged in those years acquired the ability to control major shares of their markets. To maintain that control and strive for a larger share while keeping profits high, they competed in ways different from the price-cutting of the previous stage, competitive capitalism. The structure and strategy of these huge concentrations of economic power changed in accordance with the requirements of the new ways of competing, a focus on protecting their assets from predators, and the growing importance of finance as a weapon of defense as well as offense. Thus, instead of investing in internal growth, which would contribute to overall economic growth, they may devote their resources to destroy or buy up weaker rival firms. Sometimes, of course, they take the lead in expanding capacity and creating jobs. But that is only one of a range of choices, many of which contribute to the onset or prolongation of stagnation. This can clearly be seen these days in the expanding contribution of financial operations to the profits of major industrial corporations, and in the allocation of corporate and banking resources to the mad rush of mergers and acquisitions on an international scale.

This is all a way of saying that equating monopoly with stagnation is too simple, in my opinion. One has to see the matter in historical as well as theoretical perspective—in a perspective that reaches to the roots of imperialism as well as to today's globalization.

SOCIALISM AND THE MARKET

Q: As you know, Harry, the virtues of the market are no longer sung by the University of Chicago economics department alone. In the past few decades the market has come to pervade the thought and practice even of many thinkers and parties of the left. You have criticized market socialism as "a nice, humane, regulated capitalism"—a chimera. But I take it you believe the market cannot be avoided even under genuine socialism, though it should be subordinated to democratic planning, especially in allocation of basic resources and investment.

MAGDOFF: Yes, I think it is important to distinguish the market from a market system. The market, as an institution to distribute consumer goods in a complex society, will no doubt exist for a long time to come. A market system is, of course, something else. When guided by profit maximization, the market becomes the allocator of resources: raw materials, machinery, construction goods. The market system serves to reproduce the arrived-at allocation of resources and

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sustains the prevailing distribution of income. But what is a socialist society for, if not to radically change the allocation of resources to meet the wishes and needs of the people?

Even the market function will not necessarily be the same in all societies. I was intrigued when walking through a Shanghai department store at the time of the Cultural Revolution to see separate displays of left-hand and right-hand gloves. The reason: why waste consumers' money and textiles by making people buy a full pair if only one glove is lost or damaged? That, of course, flies in the face of bourgeois logic.

Q: In "A Note on 'Market Socialism,' " in May 1995, you distinguish national planning from bureaucratic central control. How could national plans be determined democratically?

MAGDOFF: I don't think there is a necessary and inevitable connection between central planning and bureaucratic control. A bureaucratic state will use planning in its own fashion. But a democratic socialist government can and must have democratic planning if it is to remain a democracy and move toward socialism. Allocation of major resources for social use does not require national control of every detail of production. A great deal of decision-making could be delegated to regions and localities, with the national central planners acting as coordinators; the people could be provided with information and analyses needed to participate in making planning choices.

But I don't believe any of us can do much more than propose principles. I think it would be the height of arrogance for intellectuals to think they can design concretely a workable system for a people to adopt. To get concrete would be to prejudge history. So much depends on what country we are talking about. The United States or Mexico? Germany or Ghana? So much depends on the course of the struggle in transforming the society, the degree of socialist consciousness in the population.

Actually, the challenges of a transformation of consciousness, and socialist culture in general, get pitifully little attention in socialist circles. Instead the focus is on democracy, usually democracy as an abstract ideal, without regard to social relations, abolition of classes, or the road to equality. There are tough questions about what socialist democracy might mean. Take, for example, what many of us believe should be an outstanding feature of replacing capitalism: giving top priority to empowering and meeting the basic needs of the most impoverished and oppressed sectors of the population. That would require major changes in the allocation of resources, the kind of

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changes which a market system, even one where the factories are managed by the workers, cannot hope to achieve.

If we are serious about working for a democratic socialism, we would do well to clarify what we mean by democracy. We know what is wrong with democracy when there are vast class differences in power and wealth. But differences among the people will likely exist for a long time after capitalism is transcended. Consider, for example, giving priority to the needs of the most oppressed. That could mean putting off remedies for a large sector of the population, and even cutting into the living standards of the more privileged. It might mean developing the resources of some regions of the country to the disadvantage of other regions. I don't pretend to have the answers, but these are some of the questions that come to mind when I come across the facile solutions that some of our friends propose, whether market socialists or central planning advocates with a new gimmick.

WORK AND HOPE

Q: You've been an editor of MR for thirty years now. Tell me about you and Paul, and how you have functioned together.

MAGDOFF: Well, it was just as natural as it could be. Either one of us would come up with an idea for the Review of the Month, and we'd talk it over and come to some decision, and one of us would take it. We would have comments on each other's, but very minor comments. The understanding was, as with Leo, that we could each have our own Reviews of the Month. And they did: on Israel and on Czechoslovakia. But as things developed politically—China very much so is a case in point—we had the same reactions. I don't understand it. I'm not saying that if we were in separate rooms and had to write something that the formulations or analysis would be exactly the same, but the conclusions would be pretty much the same.

When Paul asked me to join him, he said, "You won't have to do anything." I had been away from things for many years. I was hoping when I got free from work that I would be able to study, to catch up, read, do some research. And Paul said, "All you'll have to do is give me your judgment on the articles, and I'll do all the writing." A short time afterward, I said, "Remember what you said?" I'd been writing all these Reviews of the Month. He said, "You didn't believe me, did you?"

Q: Reading the early issues, it surprises me how early in the magazine's life there were appeals to potential authors for brevity and clarity.

MAGDOFF: That has been, I think, a distinguishing feature of MR. Paul is very strong on that. Leo was more so. Leo was very

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critical of Paul: "Talk to workers. You have to explain things." I mean critical in a friendly way: "Revise it. You have to rewrite it. I don't understand." Well, I haven't done that with Paul, not that you need to do it much. He used to do it to mine. It made all the difference in the world. A word here, a change there—the whole thing took on different form. It was very helpful. He has been a real friend, in every sense of the word.

Q: In a 1982 essay on Edward Bellamy and other social critics, "The Meaning of Work," you argue against the bourgeois view of work as a burden to be avoided and for seeing work as a creative activity central to human existence. It occurs to me that this spirit may help explain the extraordinary late-life productivity of both you and Paul, who have continued to write, speak, lead, and edit long after most Americans retire.

MAGDOFF: I suspect what you call our late-life productivity may have more to do with the competence of our doctors! It's true that being actively involved in the good cause gives zest to life, and I feel myself fortunate in having *Monthly Review* as the focus of my activity. But I must admit that there is frustration, too, in having so little time to study and write about developments in the present global disorder, much of which we foretold over the years. The frustration, alas, comes from the pressure of administrative affairs, particularly efforts to get around the financial shoals. It would be so nice if Paul and I—Ellen, too, of course—could devote full time to study and write for the spread of the Marxist socialist project.

Q: What keeps you going?

MAGDOFF: It's my life. I never expected a socialist America in my lifetime. That doesn't mean that I was smarter than anyone else, but it just wasn't my temperament.

Every summer the Marxist School has a picnic at our place, and after they go swimming and have their food, we sit for several hours and talk under a tree. It's very nice. One person at the end this last time said, "What do you expect, and how can you be the way you are without expecting socialism?"

I said, "I don't know. I don't expect anything particular. But this is the way I am. I can't be any other way. I have to believe that there can be a better world."

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

After several years spent working closely with the magazine, Ellen Meiksins Wood—the historian and critic of political theory—officially joined Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy in March 1997 to become the first new editor of *Monthly Review* in thirty years.

Born Ellen Meiksins in New York in 1942, a year after her parents arrived as political refugees, she was raised in the United States and Europe. She received a B.A. in Slavic languages from the University of California at Berkeley in 1962 and subsequently entered the graduate program in political science at the University of California, Los Angeles, from which she received a Ph.D. in 1970. From 1967 to 1996, she taught political science at York University in Toronto, Canada.

Wood is the author of six books: *Mind and Politics: An Approach to the Meaning of Liberal and Socialist Individualism* (University of California Press, 1972), *The Retreat from Class* (Verso, 1986), *Peasant-Citizen and Slave* (Verso, 1988), *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (Verso, 1992), *Democracy Against Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), and *The Origin of Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 1999). With her husband Neal Wood, she is author of two more books: *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1978) and *A Trumpet of Sedition: Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism, 1509-1688* (New York University Press, 1997). Finally, with various colleagues, she is co-editor of the collections *In Defense of History* (1997), *Capitalism and the Information Age* (1998), and *Rising from the Ashes? Labor in the Age of "Global" Capitalism* (1998), all from Monthly Review Press. Wood served on the editorial committee of the British socialist journal *New Left Review* between 1984 and 1993, and she won the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize for her book *The Retreat from Class* in 1988.

The following interview was conducted by Christopher Phelps in New York City on November 23, 1998.

ARRIVING AT *MONTHLY REVIEW*

Q: You are only the fourth editor of MR in its fifty years of publication. How did that come about?

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WOOD: I don't know how it happened, really. It just sort of gradually emerged.

I had met Harry and Paul before at the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York, but the first time I spoke to either of them at any length, really, was at one of the international conferences of socialists held at Cavtat in Yugoslavia. It was the last one held before the whole thing—the country, not just the conference—folded up. Harry and Paul used to go to those conferences regularly, and Harry and Beadie had a tradition of inviting people to their hotel room for drinks and talk. Those get-togethers were a major feature of the conference, certainly for me. At the conference's closing dinner, I found myself sitting next to Harry, and he started ruminating about the future of MR and how hard it was going to be to find someone to take over. That was the first time I ever had occasion to think about MR in those terms. But I don't think the idea that it might be me ever crossed his mind, and it certainly didn't cross mine.

The first thing I ever wrote for MR was a very unlikely thing, a review of a book on Julius Caesar. My next piece was on the history of the market. After that, I came onto an informal editorial committee for the magazine, and one thing led to another—not least, I should say, a warm personal relationship.

Q: So it was, from your standpoint, a natural fit?

WOOD: Yes, though I have to admit that I took on the job with great trepidation, because I very much want to continue my own writing, and the job is a big responsibility.

Politically, I can't think of anything that would have been better. Having had years on the *New Left Review*, I was in a particularly good position to understand how important the MR project was. There's just nothing else like it. NLR had a lot of things going for it; it was intellectually challenging, and so on. But politically it was never very satisfying. One of the most notable things about NLR, for example, the whole time I was on the board was that even though some of the most important eruptions of working-class militancy occurred—the miners' strike, then the big Wapping strike—you'd hardly have noticed that these things were taking place if you read the *New Left Review*. I wrote an internal document once complaining about this sort of thing, doing a content analysis of the past decade or so of articles. The absence of the working class was really quite remarkable. That, for me, is one of MR's most important achievements right now: our coverage of the labor movement and our building of links with the labor left.

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Q: All of this raises the fact that it was possible for you to come on board at MR, too, because you were no longer on the NLR editorial committee.

WOOD: Yes, and in that sense MR was an unparalleled opportunity for somebody like me. I was definitely looking for another political outlet after NLR, and my political interventions are mainly my intellectual work, my writing. I don't say that writing is the most important thing for somebody to be doing. Far from it. But it's something that does need to be done, and it's what I do best.

RED DIAPERS

Q: Did you inherit your politics?

WOOD: In a manner of speaking, yes. My parents were both Bundists who came to this country as political refugees, which saved them from succumbing to the fate of other European Jews, including many members of their families. They came to the United States in 1941, after fleeing Latvia in the late 1930s because my father, who was a leader of a socialist youth organization, was about to be arrested. Other members of his group were arrested when Latvia's indigenous fascists came to power. I was born in New York during the war.

Q: So it was a political household?

WOOD: I grew up surrounded by left-wing ideas. Not just from my parents but also my father's uncle, who I think sponsored my parents' immigration, and who was editor of the Jewish socialist magazine *Der Vecker*. I spent a lot of time in my earliest years at his place, because my mother worked. Not long after my parents came to the United States, she went to work for the Jewish Labor Committee, so some of the first people I remember, apart from my own family, are people from the labor movement.

After the war—my parents had separated by then—my mother was sent to Germany by the JLC to work with displaced persons. She spent four or five years there, while I went to boarding school, partly in the U.S. and partly in Europe. I don't think that my mother ever stopped thinking of herself as a socialist. But when she came back to the United States and we settled in California, she became, I have to confess, a Democratic Party activist. She was also a member of the NAACP.

My father, who went to work for the United Nations, remains a Marxist to this day. He is a committed MR reader, but he has his own very distinct views, especially about capitalism. He likes to say that I'm

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closer than anybody else to the truth, but I'm afraid I'm disappointing him in the exchanges we have by not quite getting it. [*Laughs.*]

CANADIAN VANTAGE

Q: You moved to Canada in the late sixties, a time when there was a rising level of movement activism, both there and in the United States. How do you think that living in Canada affected your thought?

WOOD: Canada was an interesting vantage point, because it's so close to the United States, and in some ways sixties culture was the same, and yet at the same time, it gave you a kind of critical distance which people in the United States simply didn't have. Canada was in some ways a partner of U.S. imperialism, but it also stood apart.

Our students were doing things that sixties students were doing in the United States. We had demonstrations and teach-ins about the war. But Canada was also a haven for draft resisters. Neal and I had draft resisters staying in our apartment—including, by the way, Neal's son. And a lot of people who came to Canada to teach or do other things were Americans who came because of the war.

Many Canadians were coming to define their national identity against U.S. hegemony. A lot of Canadian academics were beginning to get very nervous about this influx of Americans and were adopting a nationalist position. I understood, in one sense. But one of the first things that Neal and I published after we came to Canada was an article on the Americanization of political science for a book on the Americanization of the Canadian universities. Our main point was what's the point of making this a national issue, if the way Canadians were going to do political science was thoroughly imbued with the same ideological and methodological principles that were dominant in the United States? It was a kind of mini-lesson in the limits of nationalism.

Although our own university department began by self-consciously molding itself as American-style political science, behaviorism and so on, for some peculiar reason in a very short time it turned into the most Marxist department in North America, probably in the universe. That meant a lot, in terms of my own intellectual development. I couldn't have gotten to first base with the work I was doing in *any* American university that I can think of, let alone get tenure. No question: my intellectual development would have been entirely different if I'd been teaching in an American university.

Plus, in many ways, though I hate to say it, the United States is a very provincial place, not in spite of its position in the world but because of it. It's as if the United States, this superpower, is the center of the universe. It is so centered on itself and is hardly aware that the rest of the world exists, except when it impinges on it in some sort

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of very direct way. Just look at the TV news, or, for that matter, the *New York Times*. In Canada, you were more open to other parts of the world. There was a lot more day-to-day international consciousness. Quite apart from the fact that Canada had a mildly left mainstream tradition that the United States doesn't, a social-democratic party, and so on, and a proportionately larger and more militant organized labor movement.

GENERATIONS OLD AND NEW

Q: In an essay in the 1995 *Socialist Register*, you take up the British new left—the first new left, you call it—whose experience was formed by the Depression, fascism, and the Second World War. This includes people like Ralph Miliband and, especially, dissident Communists like E. P. Thompson and John Saville, who became critical of Stalinism yet remained to the left of social democracy and retained a commitment to the labor movement and class politics. They formed a tradition that, I take it, you find congenial and find yourself operating within, even though you belong to a different generation.

WOOD: Yes. The point about the two generations, the first and second new left in Britain, is about different approaches to capitalism. There's nothing magical about generations, of course. But this generational shift corresponded to a real historical rupture. I was struck by the differences between the generation that came to political consciousness during the Depression and war, and the one that grew up in the so-called golden age of capitalism, the long post-war boom. These two generations had such different conceptions of what was normal for capitalism. For one, it was depression and war. For the other, it was prosperity and so on, even if a lot of people were excluded.

This was, by the way, particularly interesting in the case of Britain, because the second new left—especially the one associated with NLR—developed a whole analysis about British exceptionalism based on the assumption that British capitalism must be somehow defective because it wasn't quite sharing in the prosperity of other advanced capitalist countries. In other words, what was wrong with Britain, the reason it was in decline, wasn't so much capitalism but the wrong kind of capitalism. That's the kind of argument I set out to challenge in my book *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*.

Anyway, that generational shift played out differently in the U.S., but the same division is there, too, between people for whom economic depression and war represent capitalist normality and people shaped by the postwar "golden age."

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Q: It occurred to me that while in Britain it's called the first new left, in the United States the analogue is *Monthly Review*, even if it's seen as an old left journal here. Its editors, too, were people whose generational experience was formed by the Depression, fascism, and the Second World War, who were drawn to and were for a time in very sympathetic connection to the Communist movement, yet were eventually led to go beyond that politics and have nevertheless remained on the left of the left. But not many people would put Edward Thompson, Paul Sweezy, and Harry Magdoff in the same grab-bag.

WOOD: No, they'd probably think of C. Wright Mills, or someone like that, as the first generation in the United States.

Q: But that's the whole difference. Mills said, "Give up Marx and the 'labor metaphysic.' "

WOOD: Exactly, exactly. Another first-generation new left intellectual who comes to mind here, though he was a transplanted American, is Herbert Marcuse. He too regarded students and intellectuals as the revolutionary vanguard because he thought the working class had been thoroughly absorbed by consumer capitalism. But the new left in Britain wasn't, *couldn't* be so detached from the labor movement. They thought that socialist intellectuals had to take on new forms of intellectual and cultural struggle, because of the effects of consumer capitalism. But the working class stayed at the center of their intellectual and political project in a way that it didn't for the U.S. new left. So I think that your suggestion that the editors of MR had something essential in common with the British first new left is interesting. Some of those commonalities may be obscured by MR's interest in Maoism, which was pretty alien to the British new left, but in general I find the point useful.

Q: You seem an exception to the generational shift you're talking about, in that you belong to the generation of the postwar boom yet you have these affinities with an earlier left generation. Is it your engagement with British Marxism, the influence of your parents, or what? You yourself never experienced the Depression or the Second World War, except refracted through childhood.

WOOD: I suppose it's true that people like me, first-generation children of immigrant parents who lost many members of their family in the Holocaust and war, who fled fascism, and so on, have a more direct continuity with the experience of that generation. I also saw the palpable results of the war when I went to Germany with my mother as a small child. I went there, and to boarding school, because

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my mother, obviously because of her own experience and what happened to her family, felt a need to do the job she was sent there to do for the Jewish Labor Committee.

So in all these ways my experience was shaped by that, but my point about generational shifts really has to do with the different approaches to capitalism, and I just happen to find the approach of the first new left, both British and MR, more convincing. The way capitalism is shaping up today, that first new left seems a lot more up to date. It certainly has a lot more to tell us about the way things are now than those who followed them—not just more than the second new left, but an awful lot more than the later postmodernist left, which is completely out of its depth in the current global crisis.

Q: To return to a point, then, it's as if there's not going to be a generational shift at MR, so much as the passing of the torch generationally.

WOOD: If what you're saying is I'm not typical of my generation, maybe so. But I don't want to overdo it. After all, I was born and grew up mostly in the United States, and I experienced many of the same things that others of my generation did. I feel politically close to an earlier left, but it still matters that I grew up in a particular moment and place. And it matters for the magazine that the intellectual and political culture of the left today is still pretty much rooted in the one created by people of my generation.

Q: You mean the culture of the "golden age" of capitalism—namely, the prospect or illusion of permanent and universal affluence?

WOOD: Maybe the *existence* of affluence and the illusion of the *possibility* of its universality, because obviously there was a darker reality, which this generation of the left perceived in a particularly dramatic way. They realized that there were whole sections of the population that were being excluded, and that's what their opposition mainly focused on.

In the stuff that I've been writing, I've emphasized the "golden age" of capitalism as the shaping influence and suggested that, with some exceptions, the mainstream of the sixties left was not made up of revolutionary socialists. Sixties radicals were, in a way, shaped by the apparent success of capitalism instead of its failures. They thought that welfare and consumer capitalism were here to stay in some form or another, but they recognized that some people were excluded. Inclusion of those who were excluded was probably more central to their view of the world than a complete transformation of the capitalist system or something that we would recognize as

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socialism, even if they called themselves socialists. I don't know how many of them had a clear view of anything more than a more democratic, non-imperialist, and non-racist capitalism.

The negative side of that picture is that they often didn't have a clear perception of capitalism. The positive side, which maybe I haven't emphasized enough, is that it focused their attention on those excluded groups, in ways that earlier generations of the left hadn't. I don't want to go too far with that, because I don't buy the view that the old left, traditional Marxists, were not interested in race and gender oppression. On the contrary, I would take strong exception to the view that Marxists took second place to anyone on these questions. But it's true that my generation focused on them in a way that hadn't been done before. In a way, that's the up side of their failure, the virtue of their vice: by not taking the full measure of capitalism but focusing on the people who were excluded from its temporary prosperity, they could do the most positive things that they did, especially in anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles.

Another point is that while in the fifties, the so-called golden age, you had a picture of general middle-class prosperity, on the other hand you had the Cold War. I went to school at a time when we were having regular air raid drills and had to sit in the corridors, learning how to supposedly protect our eyes and heads from the atom bomb. Now that was a really effective ideological strategy. This was a period when certain books were banned from libraries, books by Howard Fast and others. You've got to think that the anti-socialist ideology penetrated really deeply and also shaped the whole generation after mine.

One of my first and most dramatic political memories is a big NAACP rally at Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, a huge venue, held in memory of Emmett Till, the black teenager who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955. I vividly remember this rally at which his great uncle, a preacher, who he had been staying with when he traveled down from Chicago, was the main speaker. I obviously couldn't have known that this murder would represent a pivotal moment in the development of the civil rights movement, but it says a lot about the tensions of the times in which my generation grew up.

In one way or another, these things, taken together, were impinging on people's minds. On the one hand, you're surrounded by the prosperity of capitalism. On the other hand, you notice the exclusions from it. You know, Ozzie and Harriet on TV, and at the same time Emmett Till is murdered. And all the while, you have the main alternative, socialism, ruled out in the most decisive possible way, presented as the incarnation of evil.

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MOVEMENTS AND CLASS POLITICS

Q: The issues that you're describing that generation being concerned about are the issues of the so-called new social movements—that is, anti-racism, feminism, ecology, the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements, all movements that were not confined to the labor movement and that often sat uneasily with the existing labor movement. The rap on people like yourself, in some circles, is that you're a class fundamentalist, inattentive to these sorts of concerns.

WOOD: There are several different ways of approaching this. One is to start from the premise that the fundamental reality in the world in which we live is capitalism. What is the constitutive relationship of capitalism? Class. Without the class division between capital and labor, you have no capitalism. It's as simple as that. If by some miracle we could get rid of racial and gender oppression, capitalism could still exist. None of these other relationships are constitutive of the system in the same way. So I've never been able to think myself out of the view that if the system is to be transformed, we have to go to the root of its constitutive relationship. But I have never believed that there's anything inevitable about it. I've summed up my position in this way more than once: if it doesn't happen by means of the self-emancipation of the working class, it's not going to happen at all.

Secondly, I have never taken the view that the working class consists of white, male, industrial blue-collar workers, and I know of no sophisticated Marxist who has ever thought that. I think that the old left got a bad rap on that, too. If you look at the history of the United States, no movement has been as consistent in its struggle for racial emancipation, the emancipation of women, and so on, as the socialist movement. Now, I'm not going to say that there haven't been huge omissions, or that the social movements haven't taught us lessons that we have to learn. But I think we have to keep that history in mind.

You can say that one side of the bringing together of whatever you want to call it—say, identity politics—and class politics is that it has always been necessary for the working class to take into account its diversity. It has never succeeded in anything it's done and will never succeed in anything it seeks to do *without* taking into account diversity. That's one side of the issue, but you can't say it's the only reason we ought to be interested, simply because it's the only way of creating unity in the working class. It's an important reason but obviously not the only reason. Socialists have to have a deep-seated commitment to all forms of human emancipation, period.

The other side of the coin is that I don't know that any of these other particular struggles will succeed on their own. I do believe that capitalism can tolerate a degree of formal equality among races and

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sexes that no previous system was able to do. But capitalism can make use of various inequalities besides its own constitutive class inequalities, and that's a profoundly important part of it. It has much to gain from dividing the working class. It has much to gain from constituting underclasses. These things also have profound ideological effects: people are able to think of the deprivations of capitalism as caused by anything and everything but capitalism itself. So capitalism has many reasons for making use of historic differences and oppressions which predate it, but which it can appropriate to its own purposes. That's why struggles against these oppressions have to be anti-capitalist, in the end.

CLASS: RETREATS AND RETURNS

Q: All of this, then, gets to the heart of your criticism of postmodernism, which celebrates—or calls unavoidable—difference, fragmentation, and so forth. I take it you would think of postmodern social theory, at least in academic circles, as being the highest form of the raw thought of this generation that we've been discussing. You came to light, I think, for many people with *The Retreat from Class,* a polemic against defectors from Marxism who were moving in a postmodernist direction at a time when that seemed to be *the* direction.

WOOD: Yes, I consider post-Marxism self-defeating from the standpoint of its own emancipatory projects, both in strategic and ideological terms. I recently wrote a preface for a new edition of *The Retreat from Class.* When I looked back over the book, I was really struck by the contradictions in post-Marxism. On the one hand, these post-Marxists were emphasizing fragmentation, difference, all the rest of it that we now associate with postmodernism, and rejecting class politics and the universalistic politics we associate with Marxism. On the other hand, there was still something really universalist about what these post-Marxists were saying, in an abstract sort of way.

What I realized was that at that stage in the development of post-Marxism, people like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe were still trying to invoke what looked like universalistic principles, such as the notion of "radical democracy," but they had to do it in an empty, abstract way because their project had no social foundation. They did go a long distance in fragmenting the project, in separating struggles, in talking about class as too totalizing a concept, and so on. But they still, at that stage, thought of themselves as socialists and were looking for some lowest common denominator with which to bring these projects together, although they had undermined any social foundation for bringing them together. "Radical democracy" was the most vivid example of a completely abstract and vacuous idea, a lowest common denominator into which you could fit all these different

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struggles. So post-Marxism was attacking Marxist universalism and totalizations, but it was coming up with a much more abstract universalism, much less grounded in historical specificity than Marxism is. Next, postmodernists dissolved even that vague kind of universalism, so that there was nothing left. All you have now is fragmentation and difference.

I'm all in favor of celebrating the diversity of human beings. In fact, I think the strength of the Marxist project is that it does recognize difference, specificities, and grounds its project in a real social world, but that it has a unifying principle—class—based upon lived experience. Obviously class can't cover *all* emancipatory struggles, but it can provide some sort of unifying principle *among* emancipatory struggles that's completely lacking in the postmodernist perspective. It can bring together women and men, black and white, based on their common experience of work and exploitation and common interest in a classless society. Incidentally, this common class project, this common anti-capitalist project, seems to me much more substantial and meaningfully democratic than the post-Marxist conception of radical democracy. The democratic project I'm talking about not only connects to concrete social realities but also demands the penetration of popular power into those huge spheres of life which capitalism seals off from democracy, all those spheres controlled either directly by the power of capital or indirectly by the so-called laws of the market.

But of course class unity and struggle don't come automatically. They require lots of work, political, organizational, and intellectual.

Q: Do you have a sense that class is coming back now, even in the universities? You have written that the conjunction of the ebbing of the sixties movements with a downturn in the advanced capitalist economies was the particular moment of take-off for postmodernism. As the prospects for radical change diminished, these flights of fancy became more voguish. Now we're at a different conjuncture, with evidence of even more profound instability in the world economy, combined with what seem to be new pulses of life in world labor movements, although that's an uneven process. So you have Jacques Derrida saying that Marx is back, and Richard Rorty calling for a return to class politics.

WOOD: Right, and even Judith Butler is making some nervous noises.

Q: Yet doing it in a way that sneaks class in the back door while retaining a good part of their old method.

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WOOD: It's true. I've been writing about how recent fashions of the intellectual left are rooted in the golden age of capitalism and all that it produced. But what's characteristic about that postwar boom is that it was *atypical.* It's just that we happened to grow up in that atypical moment and regarded it as the capitalist norm, so that when it ended, and capitalism showed itself to be what it is, this was a cataclysmic moment in the consciousness of a whole generation. You also have to take into account that the boom created a huge layer of academics with the growth of the universities. The radicals of the sixties were becoming senior professors in the years after the golden age of capitalism ended. People have obviously reacted to all this in many different ways, but one powerful trend has been the tendency to transform politics into a disembodied academic exercise. You know the kind of thing: instead of social revolution carried out by popular struggles, you get textual deconstruction carried out by intellectuals, as if this were the most subversive activity possible.

The world is changing yet again, but I don't know what the consequences will be. It's still early days. I'm a great believer in objective reality impressing itself on consciousness eventually, and things are going on in the world which these intellectual currents can't accommodate. Eruptions of class politics: people, workers, are out in the streets in various parts of the world, in a way that we haven't seen in a long time.

QUESTIONING GLOBALIZATION

Q: That is a perfect point of departure for us to take up what I think it would be fair to say has been the great debate of your editorial tenure so far, the globalization debate. MR has been taken to task for being an ostrich, sticking its head in the sand, saying that nothing has changed. A recent article in *Race & Class* faulted MR, among others, for "an unthinking adherence to theories and concepts that belonged principally to the industrial period of capitalism that Marx was writing in and about."

WOOD: Look, it's complete rubbish to say that MR's position has been that nothing has changed. MR is famous for talking about changes in capitalism, and it continues to talk about changes. I just don't see how it's possible to say that we have denied that there have been significant changes going on in the nature of capitalism. For example, MR has long been saying things about the current developments in capitalism which other people are suddenly discovering. It's almost comical how the financial press is now talking about crises of overcapacity, which MR has been writing about for ages.

We haven't, by the way, spelled out a comprehensive theory of globalization. We've just introduced some critical and cautionary

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notes about how other people have been talking about it. I can only talk about the things I've been emphasizing myself: the assumptions people are making about the state under global capitalism; the assumptions they are making about the unity of the capitalist class under global capitalism; and the treatment of the changes as a distinctive and unique kind of "epochal shift," which I think has all kinds of ideological implications.

The assumption that the integration of world capitalism, the existence of transnational companies, and so on, somehow makes the nation-state irrelevant has a lot of implications. It means that the classic target for political struggle is effectively gone from the scene. I've been putting that in question, because I don't think it is true that the state has ceased to be a major player as a result of these trends that people are calling globalization. On the contrary, I think that it has a very essential, absolutely indispensable function in helping capital navigate the global economy. It's just not good enough to call the state irrelevant, to talk about the loss of sovereignty to international organizations of capital. I think all of that is a complete mystification and very politically disabling.

Obviously, this is especially true of the most developed capitalist countries, the U.S. in particular. Less developed countries are obviously subject to the coercions of advanced capitalist states and so-called international agencies like the IMF, although those instruments are of course bound up with the U.S. state. But I don't think it's insignificant that imperialism today takes a different form than it used to, that imperialist states can't just penetrate all borders without working through other, local states. Globalization in one way or another acts through the medium of states. And I think it makes a difference whether states in the third world are in direct and deliberate collusion with imperial powers and transnational corporations. I do think there are important struggles to be carried on here, which you can't just write off by saying that everything is in the hands of the international organizations and international capital. Of course, new forms of internationalism are vital now, but looking for that internationalism shouldn't become an excuse for giving up on local, national struggles.

The other tendency, to identify globalization with the increasing unity of capital, seems to me rubbish. If globalization means anything, it means increasing contradictions in capital, including the intensification of competition. It also means that the escape routes that capitalism used to have in the form of imperialist expansion by military means, to take formerly non-capitalist areas and absorb them, are not as readily available as they once were, now that capitalism has become more universal. The new forms of imperialism—of debt, of the financial system—are riddled with the internal contradictions of

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capitalism in ways that earlier forms weren't. What we're seeing now in the aftermath of the Asian crisis is a perfect illustration of the deep-seated and completely unresolvable contradictions that come with the universalization of capitalism. In other words, you can't look at the spread of capitalism, the universalization, as simply demonstrating the triumphant power of the system and the foreclosure of opposition to it. You can't just look at the ways the universalization of capitalism inhibits struggle—for instance, by making capital more mobile. Sure, that's true. But you also have to think of it as the universalization of capitalism's contradictions and all the possibilities of struggle that come with that.

Q: Maybe because of some early formulations or the way in which the debate was pitted, people have taken you not merely to be questioning certain assumptions about globalization but to be questioning globalization itself, saying, "It's just the same old capitalism." It occurs to me that you are actually saying that the globe is more capitalist than ever, that capitalism has penetrated areas that it could only dream of penetrating before, but that capital itself is still mostly not global.

WOOD: Well, that's an interesting way of putting it. I think that people do have a tendency to confuse the two. It's important to point out, as others have done, that production still takes place in largely nationally-based companies. It's also important to emphasize, as I've tried to do, that national capitals—especially in advanced capitalist countries like the United States—are still supported by their own nation-states, even when they have a transnational reach. But the persistence of national economies, nationally based capital, nation-states, and so on is completely consistent with what I call the universalization of capitalism: the penetration of the capitalist logic deeper into the societies of advanced capitalism and spatially throughout the world. By the way, the universalization of capitalism in this sense doesn't mean the universalization of capitalist prosperity, success, industrialization, or development. On the contrary, it can mean the universalization of capitalist polarization, which is, I think, what has happened. One major effect of globalization has been that the countries left on the margins are increasingly impoverished.

Q: What's the difference between positing a change with such enormous ramifications as the one you're now describing and saying that there has been an epochal shift? I realize that you believe that the logic of the system remains the same, only extended across a much greater horizon, whereas the accounts you criticize seem to imply that the logic of capitalism itself has been superseded by some new era.

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On the other hand, you do believe that a gigantic change in the operations of global capitalism has occurred.

WOOD: Yes, massive changes have occurred, but this has been part of a process in capitalism since its inception: the logic of expansion and integration, both vertically and horizontally. So there has to be a reason why you want to designate 1972 as a moment when this happened in some special and new way, the way some people do who talk about globalization as a new epoch. I explicitly said in my very first article on the subject in the pages of *Monthly Review* that I don't rule out identifying the early 1970s as a specific moment. I think it has to do with the end of the postwar boom rather than with an epochal shift in the sense that they mean, but I haven't ruled out that something significant happened then. I just think it's more accurate and fruitful to look at it as a long-term process of universalization.

Q: That at the level of the system the continuities are more significant than the discontinuities?

WOOD: Yes, as long as we recognize that the continuities mean constant change and contradiction. But I'm interested in why people feel so driven to identify that particular historical moment as the beginning of a new process. Of course there's been this huge change, but the history of capitalism has been one of constant change, and I don't know exactly what is to be gained by identifying that specific moment, starting in the early 1970s or whenever, as representing a historical rupture of a qualitatively different kind from the changes that have been occurring in capitalism since its inception.

I don't see it that way. I see constant changes happening at lightning speed, and if you want to say that they are accelerating, fine, I accept all of that and think that we have to examine every historical moment in its own specific terms. Yes, of course there are differences, and there are different political tasks. We may even want to divide capitalism into distinct periods. But there's obviously an important ideological phenomenon in this idea of globalization, which is different from just analyzing change. I've been trying to ask what purpose it is serving in people's minds. Why talk about it in these apocalyptic, epochal terms? To me it's more political than analytical. People claim to be analyzing change, but to my mind they're not doing a satisfactory job of actually explaining what's been changing in capitalism. I think this obsession with the so-called epochal shift of globalization has more to do with the political trajectory of this generation than with the changes that are actually happening in capitalism. The identification of an epochal shift in the early seventies, at least the way it's talked about now, seems to me to arise from the disarray in the political and intellectual life of

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the left when the postwar boom came to an end, burying lots of hopes and expectations about the possibilities inherent in capitalism.

CAPITALISM AND SOCIALIST FUTURES

Q: This actually seems to me the guiding thread of your work: understanding capitalism properly. In books like *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* and *Democracy Against Capitalism*, you analytically distinguish bourgeois from capitalist, modernity from capitalism, and capitalism from earlier kinds of markets. All of that is about clarifying what capitalism is, what makes it a unique social system unlike all prior societies.

WOOD: Yes, that's absolutely right. If there has been one single project in all my intellectual work and in my teaching, it has been to identify the specificity of capitalism, because that seems absolutely central to our political project. Not just recognizing how the system works, which we obviously need to do if we are to mount a struggle against it, but also absorbing into our deepest consciousness the idea that this is a historically specific social form, which means that it has a beginning and an end.

Q: And yet a good part of your work has been about historical subjects, such as ancient Greek democracy, that long antedate capitalism.

WOOD: That's not unrelated, of course. I've always thought that the best way to understand capitalism as a specific social form, different from all others, is to situate it in a historical context. We're so immersed in our world that it becomes invisible. And especially now that capitalism has brought the whole world into its orbit, taking a longer historical view is really the only way we can step away from it and get it in focus.

I started working on ancient Greece because I had to teach the subject, and it got me interested, among other things, in the differences between their conception of democracy and ours. I got interested in the changes that democracy has undergone, especially the changes brought about by capitalism. What I mean is that capitalism makes universal citizenship possible but at the same time makes it less important. In precapitalist societies, possessing political rights had very direct and immediate economic implications. In capitalism, it just doesn't. A capitalist doesn't need direct political and military powers to exploit workers the way, for instance, a feudal lord needed them to exploit peasants. And having rights of citizenship doesn't prevent workers from having to sell their labor power for a wage. Feudalism, by definition, was inconceivable with universal citizenship

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rights. Try to imagine feudalism with universal adult suffrage. But capitalism can live with some kind of democracy. The world isn't divided any more between rulers who appropriate the surplus and subjects who produce it. Capitalists and workers are equally citizens. But that's because so much of our life under capitalism goes on in spheres outside the reach of democratic accountability. Capitalist exploitation goes on, and the imperatives of capital accumulation continue to operate, however much democracy there may be in some other, separate political sphere. So capitalism has changed the whole meaning of citizenship and democracy. If we want to achieve a truly democratic society now, it isn't for the most part a matter of extending political rights to people who didn't have them before. It's a question of replacing so-called economic imperatives—not just the direct class power of capital but the coercions of the market—with democratic power.

Or take the history of early modern European political thought, really my main field as a teacher. It's one of the best ways I know to get some critical distance from ideas and values we now take for granted—ideas about property, for instance. There's nothing so revealing, nothing that makes us think again about the things we take for granted, as watching a new set of values, like capitalist conceptions of property, coming into being, replacing other values, especially when they're being resisted and contested all the way.

You mention my stuff on the difference between bourgeois and capitalist and on the idea of modernity. What I've been trying to do is separate various historical developments that we tend to lump together under the heading of modernity. Some of the things people associate with modernity have nothing to do with capitalism. One reason I make these distinctions is just to sharpen our understanding of capitalism, but there are other reasons, too. For one thing, just think of the current postmodernist fashion of dumping on what they call the Enlightenment project, which is supposed to be the hallmark of modernity. Among the things postmodernists want to throw out are a lot of important political, ideological, and cultural victories embodied in that project, a lot of truly emancipatory ideas. I don't think those ideas, so-called Enlightenment ideas, should take the rap for the damage done by capitalism.

Understanding capitalism as a specific social form isn't the strong suit of today's intellectual fashions. People say that postmodernism is the cultural expression of late capitalism. That's obviously right, but it means that these intellectual currents are so absorbed in the realities of capitalism that they can't see it anymore. In that respect, they don't represent much of a challenge to it. Capitalist ideology relies on our taking capitalism for granted as the only possible mode of existence. We live within capitalism as an invisible environment,

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just as we can't see the air we breathe and fish can't see water. I guess what I've tried to do in my historical work is learn to *see* capitalism.

Q: As capitalism falls out of sight in so many contemporary left thinkers' world views, the flip side is that socialism has nearly disappeared as a political project. There's a different mood now than there was five to eight years ago, when there was a chorus of the "death of socialism," yet we're still inhabiting a moment that is stuck with the legacy of the collapse of the states that were called socialist. What do you think of the possibilities for the renewal of socialism as a political project?

WOOD: The simple answer to that is that as long as capitalism exists, socialism, which is its antithesis, is on the agenda. I have to believe that in this new moment, when the contradictions of capitalism are making themselves manifest in a way that they haven't before, people will notice.

I don't want to underestimate the ways in which the ideological baggage that we bring to this experience obstructs our capacity to perceive what's happening, to deal with it, confront it. I don't want to minimize that. Again, to get back to my generation, we've long lost the habit of thinking in fundamentally anti-capitalist ways, and I would argue that the loss of that habit long predates the collapse of Communism. That generation, or at least its legacy, still dominates the political and intellectual culture of the left. It's going to take a while to play itself out.

Sometimes I think, in my more pessimistic moments, that by the time the objective reality impresses itself on peoples' consciousness, we will have lost the intellectual, political, and organizational resources to take advantage of the moment. But then I think about even worse historical moments, like fascism and the prospect of the left reasserting itself at that time. And we see signs that young people are not satisfied with what the dominant intellectual trends are telling them about the world. And the labor movement has shown signs of taking on board a changing reality.

People are going to have to recognize that the long moment that they thought was typical isn't typical, and that what we've been seeing in the years since then is more what capitalism is about. The possibilities for its improvements are just extremely limited.

Q: In the March 1997 editorial when they brought you on board, Harry and Paul essentially said that you were the answer to the problems of succession and the continuity of the magazine with which they had been grappling. They made an interesting decision to pick you, given your somewhat different political and theoretical back-

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ground. It was a sign of their underlying generosity of spirit and, in a way, typical of the magazine, which is pegged by some people, both supporters and critics, as being much more narrow than it is.

WOOD: I think that's the way you should interpret it. These guys have socialism in their bones, a generosity of spirit, as you say. Anybody who reads their stuff knows how totally committed they are to socialism, so that won't come as a surprise. But anyone who has worked with them personally will know what I mean when I say that they have socialism in their bones. We know a lot of people who can talk the talk, but these people live it. I think it informs all of their waking moments, all of their relationships, in a way that is very uncommon.

Of course, I'm proud that they chose me to work with them, but I hope that the continuity of the magazine doesn't just depend on me. The audience is reviving. I think we're creating a growing stable of a new generation of writers, in addition to our stalwarts. And that augurs well for the magazine. I'd like to take some credit for it, but I hope that it speaks to the historical moment, that I'm lucky enough to have come on to the magazine at a moment when there is a shift in the wind so that there is a potential audience out there ready to hear the kinds of things that MR is saying.

This may sound odd, but I think that this could be MR's real historical moment. It's doing something no one else is doing, at a time when it needs to be done. In the days when MR was in its golden age, when its circulation was higher than it is now, it may have been unique but it wasn't the only left organ around. Now it's really distinctive and stands almost alone at a time when its message is particularly important. I think that's why we're growing again. Somebody has to keep alive these political and intellectual resources, and I hope we are playing a useful role in that.

May 1999 Marks Pete Seeger's 80th Birthday

Best Wishes, Comrade Pete!

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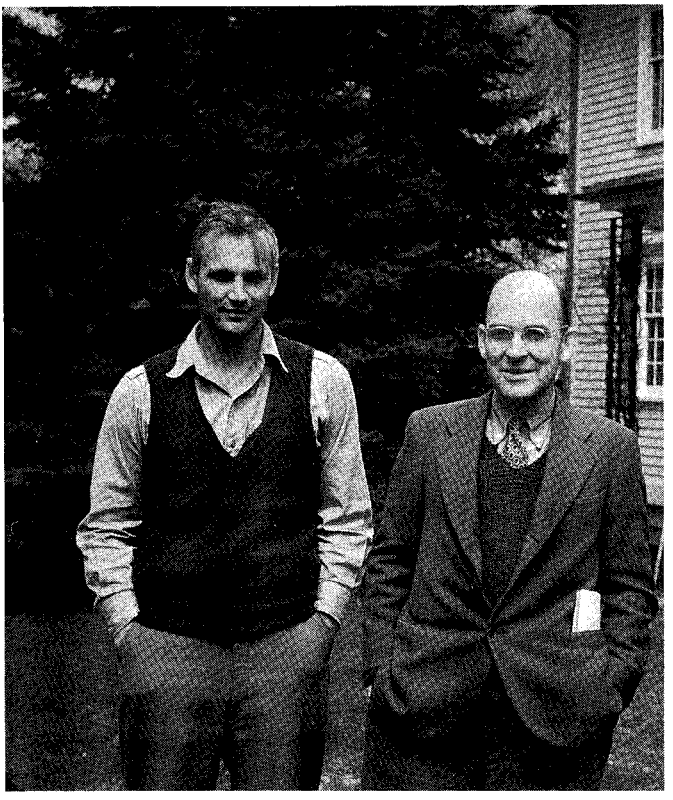

Paul Sweezy and F. O. Matthiessen,
New Hampshire, May 1948

Nancy Sweezy, Paul Sweezy,
and Gertrude Huberman at
Martha's Vineyard, July 1947

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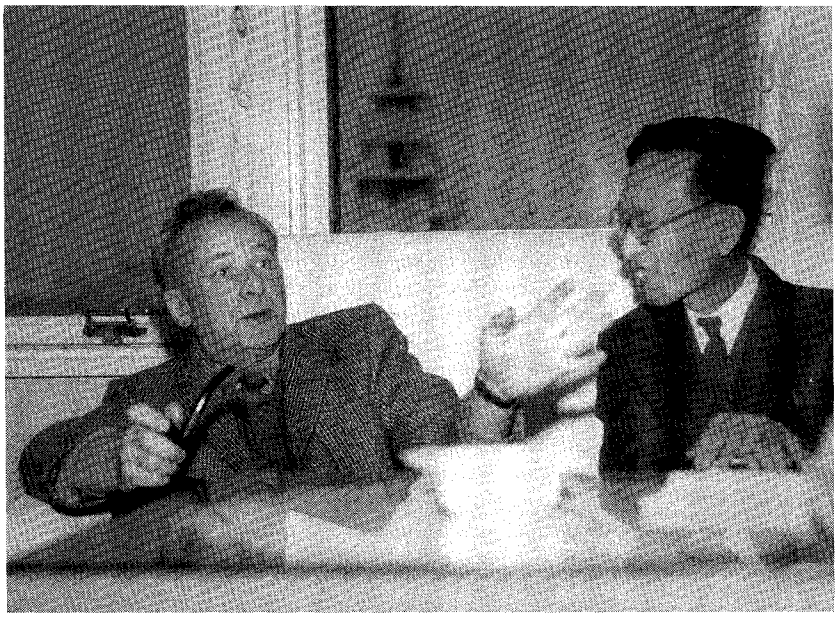

Leo Huberman and Japanese translator Yoshimasa Yukiyama, circa 1957
(Courtesy University of Oregon, Special Collections, Knight Library)

Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, circa 1960

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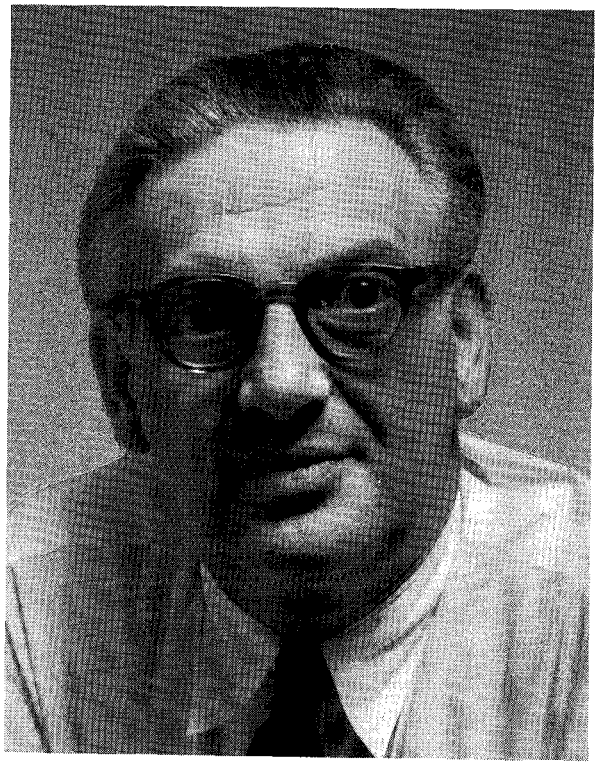
Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, Fidel Castro, and Leo Huberman, Cuba, October 1960



Paul Baran, early 1960s

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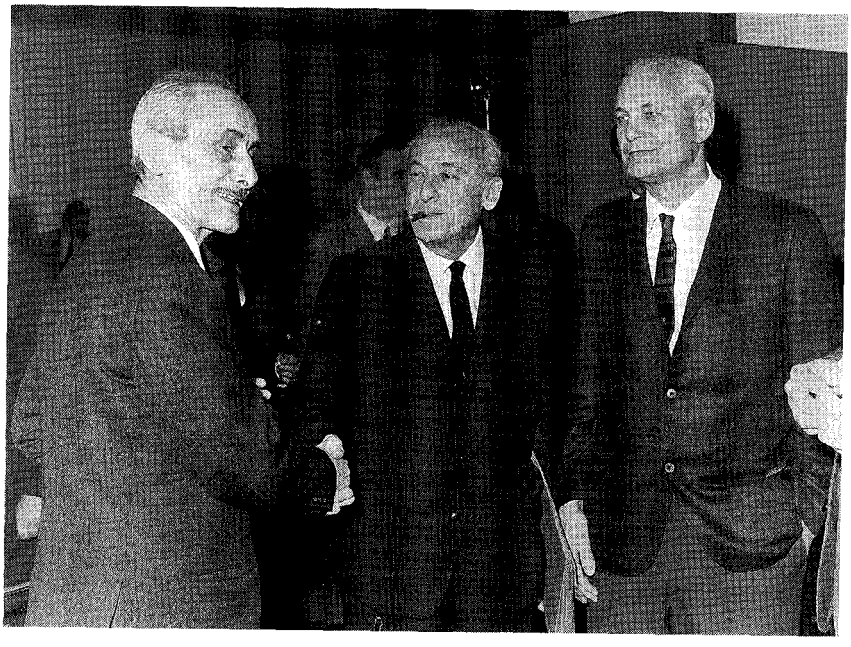
Leo Huberman, circa 1965



Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy accept the1966 Omegna Award, given by former fighters in the Italian anti-fascist resistance

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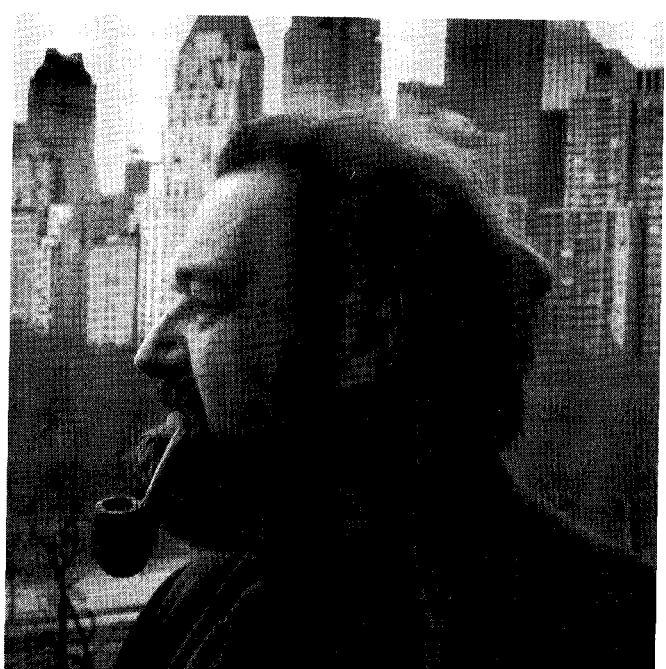
Selected covers from the Greek, Italian, and Spanish editions of MR



Harry Magdoff, Central Park, circa 1965

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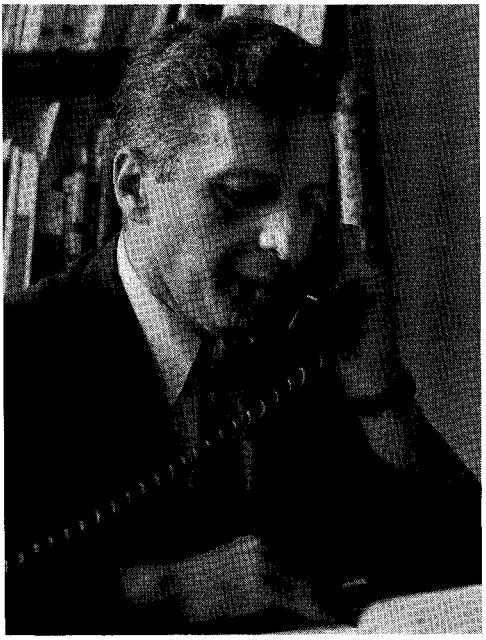
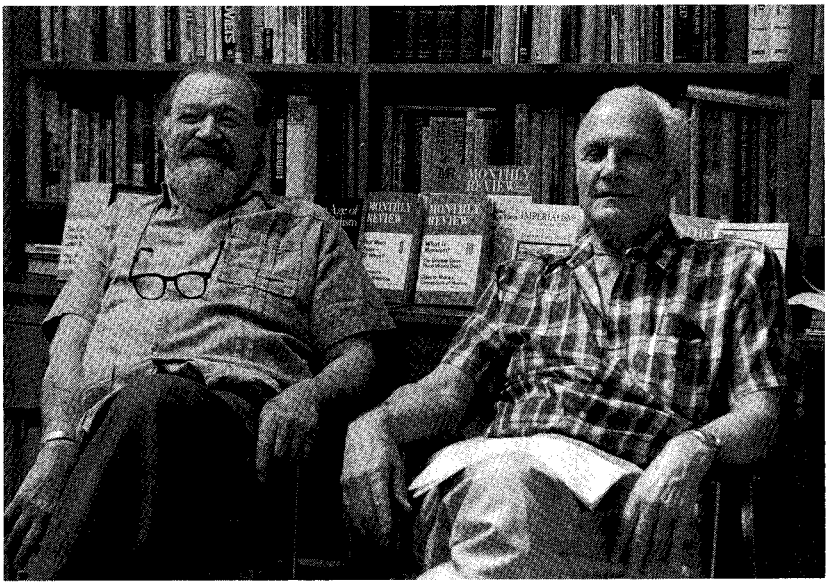


Harry Braverman
at Grove Press, mid-1960s

Sybil Huntington May,
late 1970s



Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy, 1985

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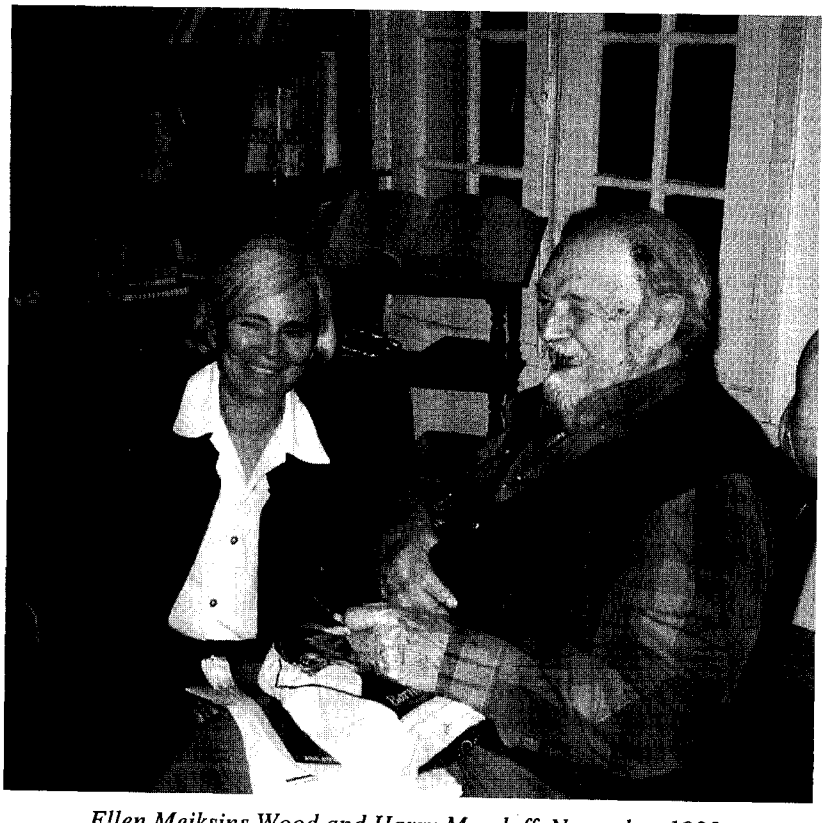
Michael Yates, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Kim Moody, and Bill Fletcher, Jr., MR *panel on labor, Socialist Scholars Conference, New York, March 1998*



Ellen Meiksins Wood and Harry Magdoff, November 1998

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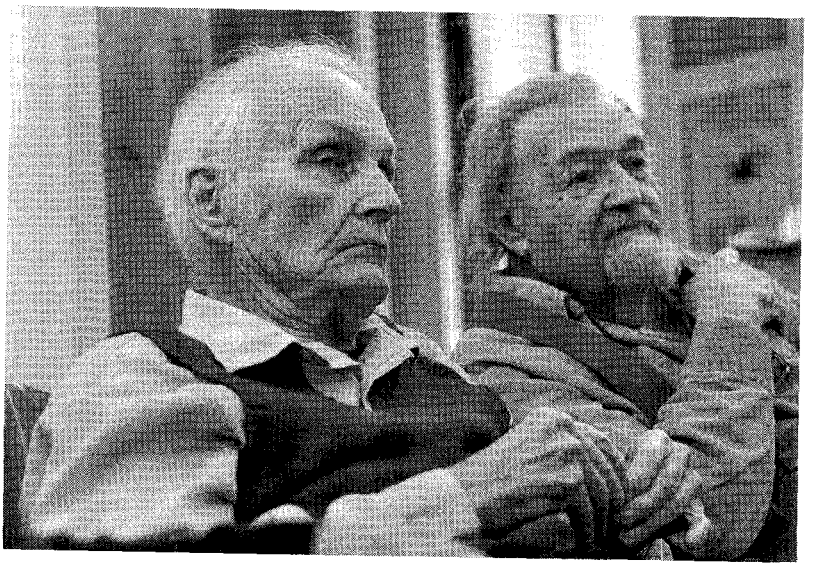

Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, February 1999

Weekly brown-bag lunch discussion, offices of Monthly Review, *February 1999*

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(Continued from inside front cover)
learn from socialist mistakes, our firmness in maintaining our socialist ideals, and our efforts to make sense of change. We intend to go on exposing oppression wherever we see it and contributing whatever we can to the construction of a more humane and democratic social order.

In the coming months, we will be celebrating our anniversary in various ways. By the time this issue appears, we will have had an opportunity to converse with many of you about our history at the fiftieth anniversary panel we are sponsoring at the Socialist Scholars Conference. We are also looking forward to seeing you at our big anniversary dinner on Friday, May 7, at Landmark on the Park (160 Central Park West, New York City), featuring reminiscences, remarks from Noam Chomsky, Ossie Davis, Michael Tigar, and Doug Dowd, and poems read by Adrienne Rich. Phillip Officer, an acclaimed cabaret singer, will also be performing some of Yip Harburg's songs. It promises to be an enjoyable and memorable evening. Call the MR office at (212) 691-2555 for more information.

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